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MILTON'S MINOR POEMS

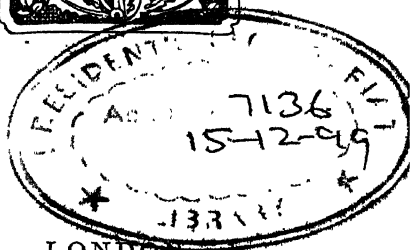
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INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
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INTRODUCTION

JOHN MILTON, 1608-74

I.—MILTON'S PLACE IN HISTORY

"I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

BLAKE, *Milton*, 1804.

IN every reader's mind the association which first attaches itself to the name Milton is that of the great epic *Paradise Lost*; and *Paradise Lost*, to most people, suggests a sublime conception at once truly poetic and essentially religious. Indeed it is hard to say whether the greatest force in Milton's life was a poet's inspiration or a zealot's faith. Certainly when Milton had to choose between his poetry and his faith the former had to yield first place to the latter for a space of twenty years. And twenty years has the value of more than the greater part of a lifetime when a man is middle-aged, as Milton was, and yet has something to achieve.

In his epoch Milton stood for Puritanism—to many of those about him for Puritanism rather than for poetry. His whole life, his work, his genius, his art, were dominated by it—some might even say, were marred by it. For his was often the zealous, political, insurgent Puritanism of the militant Roundhead days. He fought for it with his pen just as keenly, just as manfully, as did Cromwell's Ironsides with their swords. He was up in arms and embroiled on its behalf long before the swords and pikes began to try to settle differences. He gave up a large share of his moderate means for it just as the Cavaliers sold or melted down their plate for the service of the king. If he did not give up his life for it, he gave what perhaps was more practical and counted more—his life's work. And that cost him the sight of his eyes.

So we place him in history: a great Puritan poet who

became a Puritan worker and a political force in the days of the Civil War between king and parliament. Born in the early years of the seventeenth century, while Shakespeare was yet delighting London with drama, dying when three-quarters of that century had spun themselves out, when Dryden was in his prime, he links the Elizabethan Age with that of the Restoration. At the close of the Elizabethan Age the makings of the civil wars were already in evidence; in the Restoration Age the contest was but just over, and there were only the reckonings to be assessed.

Milton's life, then, falls naturally into three main periods, parallel with, illustrative of, dominated by three corresponding periods connected with the civil wars:—

1. A period of preparation and growth to 1639, when the first Bishops' War began and Milton came home from Italy.

2. A period of conflict and political strife in which Milton took part as secretary and literary upholder of the Commonwealth.

3. A period of reaction and settlement of constitutional rights after the Restoration; for Milton a period of enforced retirement and quiet when in three great literary achievements he realised the poetic ideals of his early days.

In the first period Milton grew up to be a scholarly Puritan, a cultured gentleman, a maker of most of his exquisite shorter poetry, a dreamer of drama or epic which was to set a seal upon his fame. In the second period he became a militant, revolutionary Puritan, not always a gentleman, I fear, for as a writer of heated, controversial prose he often descended from the heights which he should have occupied to indulge in scurrilous abuse. In the last period he was a despondent Puritan, blind of his eyes, slowly realising in his heart of hearts that there could be no sudden astounding miracle, divinely interposed to destroy the adversaries of Puritanism and restore its hopeless cause. Darkness had fallen all about him. And yet, in a quiet backwater, away from the dangerous main stream of hurrying, eddying life, he was attempting to console himself with visions and dreams of eternal and holy things, expressing himself with a magnificence and power which have rarely, if ever, been surpassed in the whole story of the world's achievement.

In studying any part or the whole of Milton's poetry it is most important that the atmosphere in which it grew and came to maturity should be rightly analysed. A true

apprehension of atmosphere is as imperatively necessary for *Comus* and *Lycidas* and the other shorter poems as it is for *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. Scholarship, culture, Puritanism, politics, experience, sincerity, all go to give fineness or intensity to the makings of his genius.

II.—THE LIFE OF MILTON

“Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
 England hath need of thee: she is a fen
 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword and pen,
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
 Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;
 Thou had'st a voice whose sound was like the sea:
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
 So did'st thou travel on life's common way,
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.”

WORDSWORTH, *London*, 1802.

John Milton, son of John Milton, scrivener (*i.e.* a lawyer chiefly engaged in money transactions), was born at the sign of the Spread Eagle, Cheapside, on the 9th of December, 1608. His father came of a middle-class Oxfordshire family, and was of unusually cultured tastes, especially in poetry and music. It is known that the elder Milton composed madrigals, sacred songs, and psalm tunes. He had been disinherited by the poet's grandfather, a Roman Catholic, when he became a member of the Church of England, with a strong bias towards Puritanism. Poetry, music, Puritanism must therefore have been most prominent factors in the environment of the child Milton.

(1) *The Period of Preparation and Growth: to 1639.*—The boy was educated first at grammar schools and under private tutors. The last of his tutors was Thomas Young, a keen Presbyterian, who afterwards became master of Jesus College, Cambridge. About 1620 Milton entered St. Paul's School, already famous among London schools. Even thus early the unflagging industry of the boy was remarkable, proving at least in Milton's case that a great part of genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains. “From the twelfth year of my age,” he says, “I scarcely ever went from my

lessons to bed before midnight." To apply a saying of Wordsworth's, the child was father of the man. At the age of fifteen he composed two English *Paraphrases of Psalms cxxiv. and cxxxvi.*

Early in 1625 Milton was entered as "a lesser pensioner" at Christ's College, Cambridge, and became Master of Arts in 1632. His first tutor, William Chappell, was an Arminian follower of Laud, and therefore an uncompromising opponent of Puritanism. Arminianism was a theological reaction against the sterner principles of Calvinism. The result of this uncongenial intercourse was a short period of rustication for Milton, and a tradition respecting the poet's "indocility." Milton's opinion of Laud and the Arminians will be seen in *Comus* and *Lycidas*. But it must not be forgotten that Milton himself speaks of "that more than ordinary respect which I found above any of my equals at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the Fellows of that college wherein I spent seven years." Possibly the clearest idea of Milton's appearance and character at this time may be derived from the appellation bestowed upon him of "the Lady of Christ's." During this Cambridge period he wrote *On the Death of a Fair Infant, At a Vacation Exercise, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, The Passion, Song on May Morning, On Shakespeare, On the University Carrier, Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester, At a Solemn Music, On Time, Upon the Circumcision*, and the sonnets *On the Nightingale* and *On his having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three*.

When he first went to Cambridge the intention was that he should take Holy Orders, but by 1632 that course was entirely abandoned. His repugnance to Arminianism made it quite impossible for him to serve a church in which Laud was the ruling master mind.

His father had now retired from business to Horton, in Buckinghamshire, and there in studious seclusion from 1632 to 1637 Milton gave himself up to a systematic preparation for a poet's career. He devoted himself to the study of languages, literature, and history, and produced *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Arcades, Comus, and Lycidas*. These five years at Horton must have been the happiest in his life. And in reading the Horton poems it is well to keep in mind the time and circumstances of their composition. A ripe and cultured scholar with his books; a poet with definite conviction of the inspiration of his verse and already dreaming of the place

among the immortals he was to win; a beautiful rural home with all the fresh delights of the countryside, woodland, and field, spread out daily before his eyes, and alive at dark with the songs of innumerable nightingales—what could be wanting further? Only one touch of real sadness could have reached him there, and that his deep religious feeling would sanctify with hallowed consolation. I am not thinking of *Lycidas*, his elegy. In 1637 his mother died.

Then came his continental tour, the usual finishing stage of a young man's education. He left England in April, 1638, and passed through Paris, Nice, and Genoa to Florence, where he stayed for two months, then on to Rome and another two months' stay, and finally to Naples. He contemplated further travels to Sicily and Greece, but an alarming note of impending trouble in England reached him. He did not hasten home immediately, though he seems to have thought it his duty to be prepared to take some share in the coming conflict. Again he spent two periods of two months each at Rome and Florence, at Florence meeting Galileo. Then, by way of Ferrara and Venice, he went on to Geneva, mother city of Calvinism, whence he sent home a collection of Italian books. In Italy he had made friends everywhere, except among the Jesuits, and had been hospitably welcomed as a young English poet of honourable renown. "I have sat among their learned men," he tells us. During his stay he composed many Latin and Italian verses. He was back again in England in August, 1639.

(2) *The Period of the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth*: 1639-60.—Before Milton had reached England the first Bishops' War with the Scots was over. In 1640 the second Bishops' War resulted in the summoning of the Long Parliament, and thus prepared the way for the great Civil War.

Meanwhile, Milton had settled in a pretty house with a garden, just outside Aldersgate. Here he took pupils, whom he overworked, forgetting the tremendous difference between the capacity of a genius and that of average boys. His experience in teaching led him to write a treatise on *Education*. Another treatise of this period was on the subject of *Church Government*.

He had come home from Italy with some idea of working at an epic poem on a grand scale, probably at first thinking to follow Spenser on the subject of Arthur and his knights of

the round table. This idea came to nothing. Instead, his mind began to hover over the subject, among many others, of *Paradise Lost*, his first intentions apparently being that it should take a dramatic form. "But at this very time the war began in earnest, and he resolved forthwith, "though I was then meditating certain other matters, to transfer into this struggle all my genius and all the strength of my industry." Some people scoff at the length of time which elapsed between his theoretical resolutions and his putting them into practice. Apparently he never came forward as a trained-band volunteer, and never saw a battle. It was not until 1649, when the second civil war was well over, that he took a definite place as Latin secretary to the new government. But during these seven years middle-class England was seething with hot ideas of its constitutional rights, of its liberties. In Milton's breast a similar turmoil rose and swelled. And his turmoil forced expression not in verse but in prose, though he admits that he was "not naturally disposed to this manner of writing, wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand." But he waxed ever more and more passionate on the subject of liberty in its many varied forms. From 1641 to 1649 he poured forth a stream of tracts and pamphlets. First it is ecclesiastical or religious liberty which is his theme, then domestic liberty, then civil, and then political. And all the time he was moving on from Church of England Puritan to Presbyterian and from Presbyterian to Independent, as he became more and more of a politician.

In June, 1643, Milton married Mary Powell, half his age, and daughter of an Oxfordshire Royalist who was a friend and neighbour of his family. In July she left him and refused with contempt all his requests that she should return. This experience occasioned Milton's domestic pamphlets on divorce. He saw nothing of his wife until the summer of 1645. By that time Parliament had the upper hand; the Powells were ruined and threw themselves on Milton's mercy. He received the whole family into his new home in the Barbican. In 1652 Mary died, leaving him with four daughters.

In 1644 Milton wrote the *Areopagitica*, one of his best pamphlets, upholding with trenchant partisanship the freedom of the Press. In 1645 he published his early poems.

At intervals throughout this period until 1660 he produced occasional sonnets and psalm paraphrases. By his appointment as Latin secretary to the new Parliamentary committee for foreign affairs in 1649 he was drawn into a fiery and frequently most abusive controversy in defence of the regicides. The most prominent of his adversaries were Salmasius of Leyden and Morus of Antwerp. Though some of Milton's prose is among the finest in the English language, as a whole it is marred by his descent to vulgar and unworthy vituperation. "Salmasius is an old fool," is but a very mild example of one of his methods of argument. This descent may also be seen in the second sonnet *On the Detraction which followed upon my writing certain Treatises*, and *On the new Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*. The sonnets as a whole are illustrative of the Milton of this second period.

In 1657 he moved to "Petty France," now York Street, after a short residence in Holborn. During the spring of that year his answer to the *Defensio Regia* of Salmasius rendered him partially blind. A year more and he became totally blind. In 1656 he married Catharine Woodcock, who died fifteen months later. When the Restoration was almost an accomplished fact in 1660 he produced another pamphlet pathetically behind the times, *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. To do this was not so easy as the blind poet ignorantly imagined.

(3) *The Period of Retirement: 1660-74*.—At the Restoration he left his home and remained in hiding for three months until the Act of Oblivion was passed. His books were burnt by the common hangman, and when at length he ventured forth from his retreat he was placed in the custody of the sergeant-at-arms until liberated by order of Parliament at the end of the year.

He was now in reduced circumstances, though not in want. He had lost £2000 lent to the old Parliament, as well as his investments in forfeited Royalist property. At his death he left about £900—£5000 in modern money. For the last twelve years of his life he lived at Artillery Row, on the way to Bunhill Fields, but during the great plague spent some time in a cottage at Chalfont St. Giles. Many tales are told of the undutifulness of his four daughters, but we must remember that Milton was always most exacting and unpractical in his relations with his women-folk. He never

really understood women. In 1663 he married his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, and in 1669, or thereabouts, his daughters left home to become apprentices or superior servants. Though blind, he had a great partiality for tobacco; though a Puritan he was a moderate drinker of wine. He suffered from gout and died of it on the 8th November, 1674. He was buried in the chancel of the Church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, there being present "all his learned and great friends in London, not without a concourse of the vulgar."

During this third period he accomplished the great poetic ideal of his life when *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, after being delayed by the plague and the fire. This may well be styled his period of achievement after long waiting. In 1671 appeared *Paradise Regained*, thought by some to be, as regards execution, the most perfect of Milton's works. In the same volume was the drama *Samson Agonistes*, Greek in form, Hebrew in spirit, intensely personal in the pathetic parallelism of its story with Milton's own life.

In 1670 Milton produced a *History of Britain to the Conquest*, and in 1682 a little, fragmentary *History of Muscovy*. The latter is said to have more or less fascinated most of those who have read it, and to be a model of *précis*. He left behind him in MS. at his death a remarkable *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, which throws a flood of light upon his religious convictions.

III.—MILTON THE POET

"Nor second he that rode sublime
Upon the seraph-wings of ecstasy,
The secrets of th' abyss to spy.
He passed the flaming bounds of place and time;
The living throne, the sapphire blaze,
Where angels tremble, while they gaze,
He saw; but, blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night."

The Progress of Poetry.

Thus does Gray, a keenly critical literary scholar as well as a great poet, assign to Milton his place among English poets. He thinks of him as the blind creator of *Paradise Lost*, the greatest English epic poem, one of the most magnificent of all the world's immortal epics, and places him upon an

equality with Shakespeare. With *Paradise Lost* this present volume has nothing to do: we pass from it to Milton's minor poems, all of much less magnitude, mostly of less poetic sublimity and magnificence, but still containing not only exquisitely beautiful poetry, but also poetry which is the result of the highest genius. Indeed, there are not a few admirers of Milton who prefer this or that of these shorter poems to his lengthier work. And, whatever differences there may be in such preferences, all will agree with Gray that Milton stands among the very first of all singers of immortal poetry—

“A voice as of the cherub-choir.”

The Bard.

Milton's epoch, in point of time, falls midway between that of Shakespeare—poet of nature, weaver of fluent blank verse and haunting lyrical melody—and the classic epoch of Dryden and Pope—adorers of art, masters of polished couplet and pungent satire. A greater contrast between two literary phases there could not be. And Milton is of neither phase; he is alone in the sonorous, rhythmical majesty of his blank verse, alone in the exquisite elevation of his shorter poems. Shakespeare is a keen observer of men and nature. Milton is a profound scholar, a reader of innumerable books, a skilled musician, a keen politician. Dryden and Pope are eminent literary artists.

In Milton's youth the glory of the Elizabethan Age, first in honour of all literary ages, was fading almost to extinction. Its intuitive excellencies had been wrenched into absurd excesses in a vain attempt to improve upon the best. The time of the “fantastic” or “metaphysical” (*i.e.* unnatural) poets had come, producing a school of versifiers who were never known to call a spade a spade, and rarely condescended to speak of a woman but as a nymph or naiad or some other such like artistic impossibility. Their work is marked by nice speculations of vague philosophy, by quaint conceits and fantastic wit, by far-fetched allusions worked in with elaborate ingenuity. Such things were in the air in that age; and the taint, in spite of the efforts of the Classicists, was not altogether removed from English literature when Wordsworth promulgated his manifesto respecting poetic diction. The “fantastic” school was a weedy overgrowth of artistic irregularity, or rather formlessness.

The best known example of this kind of poetry is *The Weeper*, by Crashaw, a contemporary of Milton. One of the best stanzas at least will be useful to us for comparison:—

“ Not in the evening's eyes
When they red with weeping are
For the sun that dies,
Sits Sorrow with a face so fair;
Nowhere but here did ever meet
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet.”

The subject made “ eyes ” and “ tears ” necessarily inevitable. But, more often than not, in this poem instead of “ eyes ” we get something like “ heaven's spangles ” or the atrocious “ two walking baths, two weeping motions, portable and compendious oceans.” For “ tears ” we read “ richest pearls,” “ thawing crystal,” “ rivers of cream,” and “ a brisk cherub's breakfast ”!

Now it must be noted that Milton's earlier *Ode on the Nativity* (1629) has an affinity to this kind of poetry, of which *The Weeper* has been taken as a later type. And this, with other faint traces in his two earliest sonnets, shows that the vogue did not pass him by entirely unmarked. Fortunately he was one of the most sensible of poets, much too sensible to wander far from the direct path of pure poetry. At the early age of nineteen, in a *Vacation Exercise*, he prays his “ Native Language ” (personified) to bring him—

“ Not these new-fangled toys and trimming slight
Which takes our late fantastics with delight;
But cull those richest robes and gayest attire,
Which deepest spirits and choicest wits desire.”

But for all his prayer, as we have already said, he did not escape quite scot-free, as this stanza from the *Ode on the Nativity* proves:—

“ So, when the sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave,
And the yellow-skirted fays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.”

Yet, fortunately, he did escape, to win his way to the perfect verse of *Lycidas*. Already he had fallen under the

finer influences of Spenser and Shakespeare, and began to develop a graceful, majestic style suggestive of solemn music. His lines on Shakespeare, in their way, are "admirable as from a young disciple to a dead master." His studies of cheerfulness and melancholy in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* show an extremely rapid development to a complete mastery of the poet's art. The extreme felicity of his use of the octosyllabic couplet, full or shortened, with variations of iambic or trochaic cadence, is in these two poems most remarkable. In *Arcades*, a fragment of a masque containing three beautiful songs, he is feeling his way to *Comus*. Here he turns from the couplet of *Arcades* to noble blank verse lines with some octosyllabic couplets and lyrics. Now we see the Milton who is the cultured gentleman and philosophical Puritan drawn by sheer love of poetry and music to drama in the courtly form of the masque. And then he arrives at the exquisite *Lycidas*, a classical pastoral elegy. "There cannot be better verse than *Lycidas*," says one authority, while another calls it "the high-water mark of English poetry." Here Milton created a new verse form consisting of lines and stanzas of unequal length with an irregular arrangement of rhymes until the last eight lines, which rhyme regularly.

Then for twenty years, except for an occasional sonnet, Milton lays the poetic art aside, to resume it after the Restoration in the unique, richly full-bodied, sonorous blank verse of *Paradise Lost*, a poetic creation which can only be fittingly studied by itself.

But even in his sonnets, the rare fruit of his period of self-abnegation, Milton is a master, a master whom Wordsworth was proud to follow. Here again, in this domain of poetry, he shows a new and most important departure, for he is the first Englishman to follow the pure Italian, or Petrarchan, form of sonnet. Earlier English sonneteers—Wyat, Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare—had established what is called the "English" type of sonnet, with a rhyming couplet at the close. But Milton's musical ear was attracted by the greater rhythmical beauty of the original Italian form with unrhymed close. So successful was he in this innovation that the "English" form almost entirely disappeared. And in yet another point his sonnets were an innovation. The earlier sonneteers almost invariably sang of love, but love is only once or twice touched upon by Milton in his sonnets, and never does it, even then, rise to the poet's passionate

rapture so often depicted in other poems of this class. His excellent sonnet on his deceased wife is scarcely an exception, for it is not passionate, but stirred with a deeper feeling of yearning regret for a loved one lost. Politics, friends, detractors, his youth, his blindness, these, not love, form the staple of his subject-matter. Thus we may claim for Milton that he extended the scope of the matter of the sonnet. As Wordsworth says—

“ when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few! ”

Scorn not the Sonnet.

In one quality only does it seem that Milton was lacking—in the saving grace of humour. He was much too deeply serious, far too conscious of his scholarly dignity to be humorous. Otherwise he might probably have lived a happier life. In these shorter poems the two pieces *On the University Carrier* are interesting attempts of his in the lighter vein, but it cannot be said that they are very successful. Still, they served to show him where his weakness lay; and his own inclination and taste carried him on to the kind of poetry in which he was to be supreme.

MILTON'S POEMS

PSALM CXXXVI

- Let us with a gladsome mind
✓ Praise the Lord, for he is kind;
For his mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.
- Let us blaze his name abroad,
✓ For of gods he is the God;
For his, etc.
- O let us his praises tell,
✓ Who doth the wrathful tyrants quell; 10
For his, etc.
- Who with his miracles doth make
✓ Amazed heaven and earth to shake;
For his, etc.
- Who by his wisdom did create
The painted heavens so full of state;
For his, etc. 19
- Who did the solid earth ordain
To rise above the watery plain;
For his, etc.
- Who, by his all-commanding might,
✓ Did fill the new-made world with light;
For his, etc.
- And caused the golden-tressèd sun
All the day long his course to run; 30
For his, etc.

The hornèd moon to shine by night
Amongst her spangled sisters bright;
For his, etc.

He, with his thunder-clasping hand,
Smote the first-born of Egypt land;
For his, etc.

39

And, in despite of Pharaoh fell,
He brought from thence his Israel;
For his, etc.

The ruddy waves he cleft in twain
Of the Erythræan main;
For his, etc.

The floods stood still, like walls of glass,
While the Hebrew bands did pass;
For his, etc.

50

But full soon they did devour
The tawny king with all his power;
For his, etc.

His chosen people he did bless
In the wasteful wilderness;
For his, etc.

59

In bloody battle he brought down
Kings of prowess and renown;
For his, etc.

He foiled bold Seon and his host,
That ruled the Amorrean coast;
For his, etc.

And large-limbed Og he did subdue,
With all his over-hardy crew;
For his, etc.

70

And to his servant Israel
He gave their land, therein to dwell;
For his, etc.

On the Nativity

21

✓ All living creatures he doth feed,
And with full hand supplies their need:
For his, etc.

Let us, therefore, warble forth
✓ His mighty majesty and worth; 90
For his, etc.

That his mansion hath on high,
Above the reach of mortal eye;
✓ For his mercies aye endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.

ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

Composed 1629

I

THIS is the month, and this the happy morn,
Wherein the Son of Heaven's Eternal King,
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

II

That glorious form, that light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty,
Wherewith he went at Heaven's high council-table 10
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside, and, here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

III

Say, Heavenly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the Infant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,
To welcome him to this his new abode,
Now while the heaven, by the Sun's team untrod,
Hath took no print of the approaching light, 20
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

IV

See how from far upon the eastern road
 The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet!
 Oh! run; prevent them with thy humble ode,
 And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;
 Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
 And join thy voice unto the Angel Quire,
 From out his secret altar touched with hallowed fire.

THE HYMN

I

It was the winter wild,
 While the heaven-born child
 All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies; 30
 Nature, in awe to him,
 Had doffed her gaudy trim,
 With her great Master so to sympathise:
 It was no season then for her
 To wanton with the Sun, her lusty paramour.

II

Only with speeches fair
 She woos the gentle air
 To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,
 And on her naked shame, 40
 Pollute with sinful blame,
 The saintly veil of maiden white to throw;
 Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
 Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

III

But he, her fears to cease,
 Sent down the meek-eyed Peace:
 She, crowned with olive green, came softly sliding
 Down through the turning sphere,
 His ready harbinger,
 With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing; 50
 And, waving wide her myrtle wand,
 She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

IV

No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hookèd chariot stood,
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by. 60

V

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began.
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kissed,
Whispering new joys to the mild Océan,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave.

VI

The stars, with deep amaze,
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze, 70
Bending one way their precious influence,
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
Or Lucifer that often warned them thence;
But in their glimmering orbs did glow,
Until their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

VII

And, though the shady gloom
Had given day her room,
The Sun himself withheld his wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame, 80
As his inferior flame
The new-enlightened world no more should need:
He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright throne or burning axletree could bear,

VIII

The shepherds on the lawn,
 Or ere the point of dawn,
 Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;
 Full little thought they than
 That the mighty Pan
 Was kindly come to live with them below: 90
 Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
 Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

IX

When such music sweet
 Their hearts and ears did greet
 As never was by mortal finger strook,
 Divinely-warbled voice
 Answering the stringed noise,
 As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
 The air, such pleasure loth to lose, 99
 With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

X

Nature, that heard such sound
 Beneath the hollow round
 Of Cynthia's seat the Airy region thrilling,
 Now was almost won
 To think her part was done,
 And that her reign had here its last fulfilling:
 She knew such harmony alone
 Could hold all Heaven and Earth in happier union.

XI

At last surrounds their sight
 A globe of circular light, 110
 That with long beams the shamefaced Night arrayed;
 The helmèd cherubim
 And sworded seraphim
 Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,
 Harping in loud and solemn quire,
 With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's new-born Heir.

XII

Such music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made,
But when of old the Sons of Morning sung,
While the Creator great 120
His constellations set,
And the well balanced World on hinges hung,
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their oozy channel keep.

XIII

Ring out, ye crystal spheres!
Once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow; 130
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

XIV

For, if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the Age of Gold;
And speckled Vanity
Will sicken soon and die;
And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day. 140

XV

Yea, Truth and Justice then
Will down return to men,
Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
Mercy will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
And Heaven, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high palace-hall.

XVI

But wisest Fate says No,
 This must not yet be so; 150
 The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy
 That on the bitter cross
 Must redeem our loss,
 So both himself and us to glorify:
 Yet first, to those ychained in sleep,
 The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through the deep,

XVII

With such a horrid clang
 As on Mount Sinai rang,
 While the red fire and smouldering clouds outbrake:
 The aged Earth, agast, 160
 With terror of that blast,
 Shall from the surface to the centre shake,
 When, at the world's last session,
 The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread his throne.

XVIII

And then at last our bliss
 Full and perfect is,
 But now begins; for from this happy day
 The Old Dragon under ground,
 In straiter limits bound,
 Not half so far casts his usurp'd sway, 170
 And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
 Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

XIX

The Oracles are dumb;
 No voice or hideous hum
 Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving.
 Apollo from his shrine
 Can no more divine,
 With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
 No nightly trance, or breathèd spell,
 Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell. 180

xx

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting Genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-inwoven tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

xxi

In consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth, 190
The Lars and Lemures moan with midnight plaint;
In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar Power forgoes his wonted seat.

xxii

Peor and Baälim
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-battered God of Palestine;
And moonèd Ashtaroth, 200
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine:
The Libyc Hammon shrinks his horn;
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

xxiii

And sullen Moloch, fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with cymbal's ring
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the furnace blue; 210
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste.

XXIV

Nor is Osiris seen
 In Memphian grove or green,
 Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud;
 Nor can he be at rest
 Within his sacred chest;
 Nought but profoundest Hell can be his shroud;
 In vain, with timbrelled anthems dark,
 The sable-stolèd sorcerers bear his worshipped ark. 220

XXV

He feels from Juda's land
 The dreaded Infant's hand;
 The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn;
 Nor all the gods beside
 Longer dare abide,
 Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine:
 Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
 Can in his swaddling bands control the damnèd crew.

XXVI

So, when the sun in bed,
 Curtained with cloudy red,
 Pillows his chin upon an orient wave, 230
 The flocking shadows pale
 Troop to the infernal jail,
 Each fetterèd ghost slips to his several grave,
 And the yellow-skirted fays
 Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.

XXVII

But see! the Virgin blest
 Hath laid her Babe to rest.
 Time is our tedious song should here have ending:
 Heaven's youngest-teemèd star 240
 Hath fixed her polished car,
 Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending;
 And all about the courtly stable
 Bright-harnessed Angels sit in order serviceable.

THE PASSION

I

EREWHILE of music, and ethereal mirth,
Wherewith the stage of Air and Earth did ring,
And joyous news of Heavenly Infant's birth,
My muse with Angels did divide to sing;
But headlong joy is ever on the wing,
In wintry solstice like the shortened light
Soon swallowed up in dark and long outliving night.

II

For now to sorrow must I tune my song,
And set my harp to notes of saddest woe,
Which on our dearest Lord did seize ere long, 10
Dangers, and snares, and wrongs, and worse than so,
Which he for us did freely undergo:
Most perfect Hero, tried in heaviest plight
Of labours huge and hard, too hard for human wight!

III

He, sovran Priest, stooping his regal head,
That dropt with odorous oil down his fair eyes,
Poor fleshly tabernacle enterèd,
His starry front low-roofed beneath the skies:
Oh, what a mask was there, what a disguise!
Yet more: the stroke of death he must abide; 20
Then lies him meekly down fast by his brethren's side.

IV

These latest scenes confine my roving verse:
To this horizon is my Phœbus bound.
His godlike acts, and his temptations fierce,
And former sufferings, elsewhere are found;
Loud o'er the rest Cremona's trump doth sound:
Me softer airs befit, and softer strings
Of lute, or viol still, more apt for mournful things,

V

Befriend me, Night, best patroness of grief!
Over the pole thy thickest mantle throw, 30
And work my flattered fancy to belief
That heaven and earth are coloured with my woe;
My sorrows are too dark for day to know:
The leaves should all be black whereon I write,
And letters, where my tears have washed, a wannish
white.

VI

See, see the chariot, and those rushing wheels,
That whirled the prophet up at Chebar flood;
My spirit some transporting cherub feels
To bear me where the towers of Salem stood,
Once glorious towers, now sunk in guiltless blood. 40
There doth my soul in holy vision sit,
In pensive trance, and anguish, and ecstatic fit.

VII

Mine eye hath found that sad sepulchral rock
That was the casket of Heaven's richest store,
And here, though grief my feeble hands uplock,
Yet on the softened quarry would I score
My plaining verse as lively as before;
For sure so well instructed are my tears
That they would fitly fall in ordered characters.

VIII

Or, should I thence, hurried on viewless wing, 50
Take up a weeping on the mountains wild,
The gentle neighbourhood of grove and spring
Would soon unbosom all their echoes mild;
And I (for grief is easily beguiled)
Might think the infection of my sorrows loud
Had got a race of mourners on some pregnant cloud.

This Subject the Author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished.

SONG ON MAY MORNING

Now the bright morning star, Day's harbinger,
Comes dancing from the east, and leads with her
The flowery May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose.

Hail, bounteous May, that dost inspire
Mirth, and youth, and warm desire!
Woods and groves are of thy dressing;
Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.
Thus we salute thee with our early song,
And welcome thee, and wish thee long.

10

ON SHAKESPEARE. 1630

WHAT needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
The labour of an age in pilèd stones?
Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a livelong monument.
For whilst, to the shame of slow-endeavouring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

10

ON THE UNIVERSITY CARRIER

*Who sickened in the time of his Vacancy, being forbid to go to London
by reason of the Plague*

HERE lies old Hobson. Death hath broke his girt,
And here, alas! hath laid him in the dirt;
Or else, the way being foul, twenty to one
He's here stuck in a slough, and overthrown.
'Twas such a shifter that, if truth were known,
Death was half glad when he had got him down;
For he had any time this ten years full
Dodged with him betwixt Cambridge and *The Bull*.
And surely Death could never have prevailed,
Had not his weekly course of carriage failed; 10
But lately, finding him so long at home,
And thinking now his journey's end was come,
And that he had ta'en up his latest inn,
In the kind office of a chamberlin
Showed him his room where he must lodge that night,
Pulled off his boots, and took away the light.
If any ask for him, it shall be said,
"Hobson has supped, and's newly gone to bed."

ANOTHER ON THE SAME

HERE lieth one who did most truly prove
That he could never die while he could move;
So hung his destiny, never to rot
While he might still jog on and keep his trot;
Made of sphere-metal, never to decay
Until his revolution was at stay.
Time numbers motion, yet (without a crime
'Gainst old truth) motion numbered out his time;
And, like an engine moved with wheel and weight,
His principles being ceased, he ended straight. 10
Rest, that gives all men life, gave him his death,
And too much breathing put him out of breath;
Nor were it contradiction to affirm
Too long vacation hastened on his term.
Merely to drive the time away he sickened,

Fainted, and died, nor would with ale be quickened.
 "Nay," quoth he, on his swooning bed out-stretched;
 "If I mayn't carry, sure I'll ne'er be fetched,
 But vow, though the cross doctors all stood hearers,
 For one carrier put down to make six bearers." 20
 Ease was his chief disease; and, to judge right,
 He died for heaviness that his cart went light.
 His leisure told him that his time was come,
 And lack of load made his life burdensome,
 That even to his last breath (there be that say 't)
 As he were pressed to death, he cried, "More weight!"
 But, had his doings lasted as they were,
 He had been an immortal carrier.
 Obedient to the moon he spent his date
 In course reciprocal, and had his fate 30
 Linked to the mutual flowing of the seas;
 Yet (strange to think) his wain was his increase
 His letters are delivered all and gone;
 Only remains this superscription.

L'ALLEGRO

HENCE, loathed Melancholy,
 Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born
 In Stygian cave forlorn
 'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!
 Find out some uncouth cell,
 Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
 And the night-raven sings;
 There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,
 As ragged as thy locks,
 In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell. 10
 But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
 In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,
 And by men heart-easing Mirth;
 Whom lovely Venus, at a birth,
 With two sister Graces more,
 To ivy-crownèd Bacchus bore:
 Or whether (as some sager sing)
 The frolic wind that breathes the spring,
 Zephyr, with Aurora playing,

As he met her once a-Maying, 20
There, on beds of violets blue,
And fresh-blown roses vashed in dew,
Filled her with thee, a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe, and debonair.
Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest, and youthful Jollity,
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks and wreathèd smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek, 30
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.
Come, and trip it, as you go,
On the light fantastic toe;
And in thy right hand lead with thee
The mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty;
And, if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unprovèd pleasures free; 40
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow,
Through the sweet-briar or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine;
While the cock, with lively din,
Scatters the rear of darkness thin; 50
And to the stack, or the barn-door,
Stoutly struts his dames before:
Oft listening how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill:
Sometime walking, not unseen,
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate
Where the great Sun begins his state, 60
Robed in flames and amber light,

The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.
Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,
Whilst the landskip round it measures: 70
Russet lawns, and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
Mountains on whose barren breast
The labouring clouds do often rest;
Meadows trim, with daisies pied;
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide;
Towers and battlements it sees
Bosomed high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The cynosure of neighbouring eyes. 80
Hard by a cottage chimney smokes
From betwixt two aged oaks,
Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
Are at their savoury dinner set
Of herbs and other country messes,
Which the neat-handed Phyllis dresses;
And then in haste her bower she leaves,
With Thestylis to bind the sheaves;
Or, if the earlier season lead,
To the tanned haycock in the mead. 90
Sometimes, with secure delight,
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid
Dancing in the chequered shade,
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail:
Then to a spicy nut-brown ale, 100
With stories told of many a feat,
How Faery Mab the junkets eat.
She was pinched and pulled, she said;

And he, by Friar's lantern led,
 Tells how the drudging goblin sweat
 To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
 When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
 His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn
 That ten day-labourers could not end;
 Then lies him down, the lubber fiend,
 And, stretched out all the chimney's length
 Basks at the fire his hairy strength,
 And crop-full out of doors he flings,
 Ere the first cock his matin rings.
 Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,
 By whispering winds soon lulled asleep.
 Towered cities please us then,
 And the busy hum of men,
 Where throngs of knights and barons bold,
 In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold,
 With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
 Rain influence, and judge the prize
 Of wit or arms, while both contend
 To win her grace whom all commend.
 There let Hymen oft appear
 In saffron robe, with taper clear,
 And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
 With mask and antique pageantry;
 Such sights as youthful poets dream
 On summer eves by haunted stream.
 Then to the well-trod stage anon,
 If Jonson's learned sock be on,
 Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
 Warble his native wood-notes wild.
 And ever, against eating cares,
 Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
 Married to immortal verse,
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
 In notes with many a winding bout
 Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out
 With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
 The melting voice through mazes running,
 Untwisting all the chains that tie
 The hidden soul of harmony;
 That Orpheus' self may heave his head

110

120

130

140

From golden slumber on a bed
 Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
 Such strains as would have won the ear
 Of Pluto to have quite set free
 His half-regained Eurydice. 150
 These delights if thou canst give,
 Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

IL PENSEROSO

HENCE, vain deluding Joys,
 The brood of Folly without father bred!
 How little you bested,
 Or fill the fixèd mind with all your toys!
 Dwell in some idle brain,
 And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
 As thick and numberless
 As the gay motes that people the sun-beams,
 Or likest hovering dreams,
 The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train. 10
 But, hail! thou Goddess sage and holy!
 Hail, divinest Melancholy!
 Whose saintly visage is too bright
 To hit the sense of human sight,
 And therefore to our weaker view
 O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue;
 Black, but such as in esteem
 Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,
 Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove
 To set her beauty's praise above 20
 The Sea-Nymphs, and their powers offended.
 Yet thou art higher far descended:
 Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore
 To solitary Saturn bore;
 His daughter she; in Saturn's reign
 Such mixture was not held a stain.
 Oft in glimmering bowers and glades
 He met her, and in secret shades
 * Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
 Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove. 30

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkeſt grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And ſable ſtole of cypreſs lawn
Over thy decent ſhoulders drawn.
Come; but keep thy wonted ſtate,
With even ſtep, and muſing gait,
And looks commercing with the ſkies,
Thy wrapt ſoul ſitting in thine eyes: 40
There, held in holy paſſion ſtill,
Forget thyſelf to marble, till
With a ſad leaden downward caſt
Thou fix them on the earth as faſt.
And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,
Spare Faſt, that oft with gods doth diet,
And hears the Muſes in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar ſing;
And add to theſe retired Leiſure, 50
That in trim gardens takes his pleaſure;
But, firſt and chiefeſt, with thee bring
Him that yon ſoars on golden wing,
Guiding the fiery-wheel'd throne,
The Cherub Contemplation;
And the mute Silence hiſt along,
'Leſs Philomel will deign a ſong,
In her ſweeteſt ſaddeſt plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,
While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke
Gently o'er the accuſtomed oak. 60
Sweet bird, that ſhunn'ſt the noiſe of folly,
Moſt muſical, moſt melancholy!
Thee, chauntreſs, oft the woods among
I woo, to hear thy even-ſong;
And, miſſing thee, I walk unſeen
On the dry ſmooth-shaven green
To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her highteſt noon,
Like one that had been led aſtray
Through the heaven's wide pathleſs way, 70
And oft, as if her head ſhe bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

Oft, on a plat of rising ground,
 I hear the far-off curfew sound,
 Over some wide-watered shore,
 Swinging slow with sullen roar;
 Or, if the air will not permit,
 Some still removèd place will fit,
 Where glowing embers through the room
 Teach light to counterfeit a gloom, 80
 Far from all resort of mirth,
 Save the cricket on the hearth,
 Or the bellman's drowsy charm
 To bless the doors from nightly harm.
 Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
 Be seen in some high lonely tower,
 Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
 With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere
 The spirit of Plato, to unfold
 What worlds or what past regions hold 90
 The immortal mind that hath forsook
 Her mansion in this fleshly nook;
 And of those demons that are found
 In fire, air, flood, or underground,
 Whose power hath a true consent
 With planet or with element.
 Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy
 In scepter'd pall come sweeping by,
 Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
 Or the tale of Troy divine, 100
 Or what (though rare) of later age
 Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage.
 But, O sad Virgin! that thy power
 Might raise Musæus from his bower;
 Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
 Such notes as, warbled to the string,
 Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
 And made Hell grant what love did seek;
 Or call up him that left half-told
 The story of Cambuscan bold, 110
 Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
 And who had Canace to wife,
 That owned the virtuous ring and glass,
 And of the wondrous horse of brass

On which the Tartar king did ride;
 And if aught else great bards beside
 In sage and solemn tones have sung,
 Of turneys, and of trophies hung,
 Of forests, and enchantments drear,
 Where more is meant than meets the ear. 120
 Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,
 Till civil-suited Morn appear,
 Not tricked and frownced, as she was wont
 With the Attic boy to hunt,
 But kerchieft in a comely cloud,
 While rocking winds are piping loud,
 Or ushered with a shower still,
 When the gust hath blown his fill,
 Ending on the rustling leaves,
 With minute-drops from off the eaves. 130
 And, when the sun begins to fling
 His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
 To archèd walks of twilight groves,
 And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves,
 Of pine, or monumental oak,
 Where the rude axe with heavèd stroke
 Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,
 Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.
 There, in close covert, by some brook,
 Where no profaner eye may look, 140
 Hide me from day's garish eye,
 While the bee with honeyed thigh,
 That at her flowery work doth sing,
 And the waters murmuring,
 With such consort as they keep,
 Entice the dewy-feathered Sleep.
 And let some strange mysterious dream
 Wave at his wings, in airy stream
 Of lively portraiture displayed,
 Softly on my eyelids laid; 150
 And, as I wake, sweet music breathe
 Above, about, or underneath,
 Sent by some Spirit to mortals good,
 Or the unseen Genius of the wood.
 But let my due feet never fail
 To walk the studious cloister's pale,

And love the high embowèd roof,
 With antique pillars massy-proof,
 And storied windows richly dight,
 Casting a dim religious light. 160
 There let the pealing organ blow,
 To the full-voiced quire below,
 In service high and anthems clear,
 As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
 Dissolve me into ecstasies,
 And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.
 And may at last my weary age
 Find out the peaceful hermitage,
 The hairy gown and mossy cell,
 Where I may sit and rightly spell 170
 Of every star that heaven doth shew,
 And every herb that sips the dew,
 Till old experience do attain
 To something like prophetic strain.
 These pleasures, Melancholy, give;
 And I with thee will choose to live.

ARCADES

Part of an Entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield by some Noble Persons of her family; who appear on the Scene in pastoral habit, moving towards the seat of state, with this song:

I. SONG

Look, Nymphs and Shepherds, look!
 What sudden blaze of majesty
 Is that which we from hence descry,
 Too divine to be mistook?

This, this is she
 To whom our vows and wishes bend:
 Here our solemn search hath end.

Fame, that her high worth to raise
 Seemed erst so lavish and profuse,
 We may justly now accuse 10
 Of detraction from her praise:
 Less than half we find expressed;
 Envy bid conceal the rest.

Mark what radiant state she spreads,
 In circle round her shining throne
 Shooting her beams like silver threads:
 This, this is she alone,
 Sitting like a goddess bright
 In the centre of her light.

Might she the wise Latona be, 20
 Or the towered Cybele,
 Mother of a hundred gods?
 Juno dares not give her odds:
 Who had thought this clime had held
 A deity so unparalleled?

As they come forward, THE GENIUS OF THE WOOD appears, and, turning toward them, speaks.

Gen. Stay, gentle Swains, for, though in this disguise,
 I see bright honour sparkle through your eyes;
 Of famous Arcady ye are, and sprung
 Of that renownèd flood, so often sung,
 Divine Alpheus, who, by secret sluice, 30
 Stole under seas to meet his Arethuse;
 And ye, the breathing roses of the wood,
 Fair silver-buskin'd Nymphs, as great and good.
 I know this quest of yours and free intent
 Was all in honour and devotion meant
 To the great mistress of yon princely shrine,
 Whom with low reverence I adore as mine,
 And with all helpful service will comply
 To further this night's glad solemnity,
 And lead ye where ye may more near behold 40
 What shallow-searching Fame hath left untold;
 Which I full oft, amidst these shades alone,
 Have sat to wonder at, and gaze upon.
 For know, by lot from Jove, I am the Power
 Of this fair wood, and live in oaken bower,
 To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove
 With ringlets quaint and wanton windings wove;
 And all my plants I save from nightly ill
 Of noisome winds and blasting vapours chill;
 And from the boughs brush off the evil dew, 50

And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,
 Or what the cross dire-looking planet smites,
 Or hurtful worm with cankered venom bites.
 When evening grey doth rise, I fetch my round
 Over the mount, and all this hallowed ground;
 And early, ere the odorous breath of morn
 Awakes the slumbering leaves, or tasselled horn
 Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,
 Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
 With puissant words and murmurs made to bless. 60
 But else, in deep of night, when drowsiness
 Hath locked up mortal sense, then listen I
 To the celestial Sirens' harmony,
 That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,
 And sing to those that hold the vital shears,
 And turn the adamantine spindle round
 On which the fate of gods and men is wound.
 Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie,
 To lull the daughters of Necessity,
 And keep unsteady Nature to her law, 70
 And the low world in measured motion draw
 After the heavenly tune, which none can hear
 Of human mould with gross unpurgèd ear.
 And yet such music worthiest were to blaze
 The peerless height of her immortal praise
 Whose lustre leads us, and for her most fit,
 If my inferior hand or voice could hit
 Inimitable sounds. Yet, as we go,
 Whate'er the skill of lesser gods can show
 I will assay, her worth to celebrate, 80
 And so attend ye toward her glittering state;
 Where ye may all, that are of noble stem,
 Approach, and kiss her sacred vesture's hem.

II. SONG

O'er the smooth enamelled green,
 Where no print of step hath been,
 Follow me, as I sing
 And touch the warbled string;
 Under the shady roof
 Of branching elm star-proof
 Follow me.

I will bring you where she sits,
 Clad in splendour as befits
 Her deity.
 Such a rural Queen
 All Arcadia hath not seen.

III. SONG

Nymphs and Shepherds, dance no more
 By sandy Ladon's liliated banks;
 On old Lycæus, or Cyllene hoar,
 Trip no more in twilight ranks;
 Though Erymanth your loss deplore, 100
 A better soil shall give ye thanks.
 From the stony Mænalus
 Bring your flocks, and live with us;
 Here ye shall have greater grace,
 To serve the Lady of this place.
 Though Syrinx your Pan's mistress were,
 Yet Syrinx well might wait on her.
 Such a rural Queen
 All Arcadia hath not seen.

AT A SOLEMN MUSIC

BLEST pair of Sirens, pledges of Heaven's joy,
 Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
 Wed your divine sounds, and mixed power employ,
 Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce;
 And to our high-raised phantasy present
 That undisturb'd song of pure concent,
 Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne
 To him that sits thereon,
 With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;
 Where the bright Seraphim in burning row 10
 Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,
 And the Cherubic host in thousand quires
 Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
 With those just Spirits that wear victorious palms,
 Hymns devout and holy psalms

Singing everlastingly:

That we on Earth, with undiscording voice,
 May rightly answer that melodious noise;
 As once we did, till disproportioned sin
 Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din 20
 Broke the fair music that all creatures made
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
 In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
 In first obedience, and their state of good.
 O, may we soon again renew that song,
 And keep in tune with Heaven, till God ere long
 To his celestial consort us unite,
 To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light!

ON TIME

FLY, envious Time, till thou run out thy race:
 Call on the lazy leaden-stepping Hours,
 Whose speed is but the heavy plummet's pace;
 And glut thyself with what thy womb devours,
 Which is no more than what is false and vain,
 And merely mortal dross;
 So little is our loss,
 So little is thy gain!
 For, when as each thing bad thou hast entombed,
 And, last of all, thy greedy self consumed, 10
 Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss
 With an individual kiss,
 And Joy shall overtake us as a flood;
 When every thing that is sincerely good,
 And perfectly divine,
 With Truth, and Peace, and Love, shall ever shine
 About the supreme throne
 Of him, to whose happy-making sight alone
 When once our heavenly-guided soul shall climb,
 Then, all this earthly grossness quit, 20
 Attired with stars we shall for ever sit,
 Triumphant over Death, and Chance, and thee, O Time!

UPON THE CIRCUMCISION

YE flaming Powers, and wingèd Warriors bright,
 That erst with music, and triumphant song,
 First heard by happy watchful shepherds' ear,
 So sweetly sung your joy the clouds along,
 Through the soft silence of the listening night,
 Now mourn; and, if sad share with us to bear
 Your fiery essence can distil no tear,
 Burn in your sighs, and borrow
 Seas wept from our deep sorrow.

He who with all Heaven's heraldry whilere 10
 Entered the world now bleeds to give us ease.
 Alas! how soon our sin
 Sore doth begin
 His infancy to seize!

O more exceeding love, or law more just?
 Just law, indeed, but more exceeding love!
 For we, by rightful doom remediless,
 Were lost in death, till he, that dwelt above
 High-throned in secret bliss, for us frail dust
 Emptied his glory, even to nakedness; 20
 And that great covenant which we still transgress
 Entirely satisfied,
 And the full wrath beside
 Of vengeful justice bore for our excess,
 And seals obedience first with wounding smart
 This day; but oh! ere long,
 Huge pangs and strong
 Will pierce more near his heart.

COMUS

A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634, etc.

DEDICATION OF THE ANONYMOUS EDITION
OF 1637

(Reprinted in the Edition of 1645, but omitted in that of 1673)

*To the Right Honourable John, Lord Brackley, son and heir-apparent
to the Earl of Bridgewater, etc.*

MY LORD,—This Poem, which received its first occasion of birth from yourself and others of your noble family, and much honour from your own person in the performance, now returns again to make a final dedication of itself to you. Although not openly acknowledged by the Author, yet it is a legitimate offspring, so lovely and so much desired that the often copying of it hath tired my pen to give my several friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the public view, and now to offer it up, in all rightful devotion, to those fair hopes and rare endowments of your much-promising youth, which give a full assurance to all that know you of a future excellence. Live, sweet Lord, to be the honour of your name; and receive this as your own from the hands of him who hath by many favours been long obliged to your most honoured Parents, and, as in this representation your attendant *Thyrsis*, so now in all real expression—Your faithful and most humble Servant,

H. LAWES.

*The Copy of a Letter written by Sir Henry Wotton to the
Author upon the following Poem*

(In the Edition of 1645: omitted in that of 1673)

From the College, this 13 of April, 1638.

SIR,—It was a special favour when you lately bestowed upon me here the first taste of your acquaintance, though no longer than to make me know that I wanted more time to value it and to enjoy it rightly; and, in truth, if I could then have imagined your farther stay in these parts, which I understood afterwards by Mr. H., I would have been bold, in our vulgar phrase, to mend my draught (for you left me with an extreme thirst), and to have begged your conversation again, jointly with your said learned friend, over a poor meal or two, that we might have banded together some good Authors of the ancient time; among which I observed you to have been familiar.

Since your going, you have charged me with new obligations, both for a very kind letter from you dated the 6th of this month, and for a dainty piece of entertainment which came therewith. Wherein I should much commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy in your Songs and Odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel

in our language: *Ipsa mollities*. But I must not omit to tell you that I now only owe you thanks for intimating unto me (how modestly soever) the true artificer. For the work itself I had viewed some good while before with singular delight; having received it from our common friend Mr. R., in the very close of the late R.'s Poems, printed at Oxford: whereunto it was added (as I now suppose) that the accessory might help out the principal, according to the art of Stationers, and to leave the reader *con la bocca dolce*.

Now, Sir, concerning your travels; whercin I may challenge a little more privilege of discourse with you. I suppose you will not blanch Paris in your way: therefore I have been bold to trouble you with a few lines to Mr. M. B., whom you shall easily find attending the young Lord S. as his governor; and you may surely receive from him good directions for the shaping of your farther journey into Italy, where he did reside, by my choice, some time for the King, after mine own recess from Venice.

I should think that your best line will be through the whole length of France to Marseilles, and thence by sea to Genoa; whence the passage into Tuscany is as diurnal as a Gravesend barge. I hasten, as you do, to Florence or Siena, the rather to tell you a short story, from the interest you have given me in your safety.

At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipioni, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times; having been steward to the Duca di Pagliano, who with all his family were strangled, save this only man that escaped by foresight of the tempest. With him I had often much chat of those affairs, into which he took pleasure to look back from his native harbour; and, at my departure toward Rome (which had been the centre of his experience), I had won his confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself there without offence of others or of mine own conscience. "*Signor Arrigo mio*," says he, "*I pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto* will go safely over the whole world." Of which Delphian oracle (for so I have found it) your judgement doth need no commentary; and therefore, Sir, I will commit you, with it, to the best of all securities, God's dear love, remaining—Your friend, as much to command as any of longer date,

HENRY WOTTON.

Postscript

Sir: I have expressly sent this my footboy to prevent your departure without some acknowledgement from me of the receipt of your obliging letter; having myself through some business, I know not how, neglected the ordinary conveyance. In any part where I shall understand you fixed, I shall be glad and diligent to entertain you with home novelties, even for some fomentation of our friendship, too soon interrupted in the cradle.

COMUS

THE PERSONS

The ATTENDANT SPIRIT, afterwards in the habit of THYRSIS.	THE LADY. FIRST BROTHER. SECOND BROTHER.
COMUS, with his Crew.	SABRINA, the Nymph.

The Chief Persons which presented were:—

The Lord Brackley;
Mr. Thomas Egerton, his Brother;
The Lady Alice Egerton.

(This list of the Persons, etc., appeared in the Edition of 1645, but was omitted in that of 1673.)

The first Scene discovers a wild wood.

The ATTENDANT SPIRIT descends or enters.

BEFORE the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
Which men call Earth, and, with low-thoughted care,
Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats.
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity.

10

To such my errand is; and, but for such,
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould.

But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway
Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream,
Took in by lot, 'twixt high and nether Jove,
Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles
That, like to rich and various gems, inlay

20

The unadornèd bosom of the deep;
 Which he, to grace his tributary gods,
 By course commits to severål government,
 And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns
 And wield their little tridents. But this Isle,
 The greatest and the best of all the main,
 He quarters to his blue-haired deities;
 And all this tract that fronts the falling sun 30
 A noble Peer of mickle trust and power
 Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
 An old and haughty nation, proud in arms:
 Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,
 Are coming to attend their father's state,
 And new intrusted sceptre. But their way
 Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,
 The nodding horror of whose shady brows
 Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger;
 And here their tender age might suffer peril, 40
 But that, by quick command from sovran Jove,
 I was despatched for their defence and guard:
 And listen why; for I will tell you now
 What never yet was heard in tale or song,
 From old or modern bard, in hall or bower.

Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape
 Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine,
 After the Tuscan mariners transformed,
 Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,
 On Circe's island fell. (Who knows not Circe, 50
 The daughter of the Sun, whose charmed cup
 Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
 And downward fell into a grovelling swine?)
 This Nymph, that gazed upon his clustering locks,
 With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth,
 Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son
 Much like his father, but his mother more,
 Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named:
 Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,
 Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields, 60
 At last betakes him to this ominous wood,
 And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered,
 Excels his mother at her mighty art;
 Offering to every weary traveller

His orient liquor in a crystal glass,
 To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste
 (For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst),
 Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,
 The express resemblance of the gods, is changed
 Into some brutish form of wolf or bear, 70
 Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
 All other parts remaining as they were.
 And they, so perfect in their misery,
 Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
 But boast themselves more comely than before,
 And all their friends and native home forget,
 To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.
 Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove
 Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,
 Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star 80
 I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy,
 As now I do. But first I must put off
 These my sky-robcs, spun out of Iris' woof,
 And take the weeds and likeness of a swain
 That to the service of this house belongs,
 Who, with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,
 Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
 And hush the waving woods; nor of less faith,
 And in this office of his mountain watch
 Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid 90
 Of this occasion. But I hear the tread
 Of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.

COMUS enters, with a charming rod in one hand, his glass in the other; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistering. They come in, making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold
 Now the top of heaven doth hold;
 And the gilded car of day
 His glowing axle doth allay
 In the steep Atlantic stream;
 And the slope sun his upward beam
 Shoots against the dusky pole,
 Pacing toward the other goal 100
 Of his chamber in the east.
 Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast,

Midnight shout and revelry,
 Tipsy dance and jollity.
 Braid your locks with rosy twine,
 Dropping odours, dropping wine.
 Rigour now is gone to bed;
 And Advice with scrupulous head,
 Strict Age, and sour Severity,
 With their grave saws, in slumber lie. 110
 We, that are of purer fire,
 Imitate the starry quire,
 Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,
 Lead in swift round the months and years.
 The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
 Now to the moon in wavering morrice move;
 And on the tawny sands and shelves
 Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
 By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,
 The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim, 120
 Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
 What hath night to do with sleep?
 Night hath better sweets to prove;
 Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.
 Come, let us our rites begin;
 'Tis only daylight that makes sin,
 Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
 Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,
 Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame
 Of midnight torches burns! mysterious dame, 130
 That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb
 Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,
 And makes one blot of all the air!
 Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
 Wherein thou ridest with Hecat', and befriend
 Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end
 Of all thy dues be done, and none left out;
 Ere the blabbing eastern scout,
 The nice Morn on the Indian steep,
 From her cabined loop-hole peep, 140
 And to the tell-tale Sun descry
 Our concealed solemnity.
 Come, knit hands, and beat the ground
 In a light fantastic round.

The Measure.

Break off, break off! I feel the different pace
 Of some chaste footing near about this ground.
 Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees;
 Our number may affright. Some virgin sure
 (For so I can distinguish by mine art)
 Benighted in these woods! Now to my charms, 150
 And to my wily trains: I shall ere long
 Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed
 About my mother Circe. Thus I hurl
 My dazzling spells into the spongy air,
 Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
 And give it false presentments, lest the place,
 And my quaint habits breed astonishment,
 And put the damsel to suspicious flight;
 Which must not be, for that's against my course.
 I, under fair pretence of friendly ends, 160
 And well-placed words of glozing courtesy,
 Baited with reasons not unpalatable,
 Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
 And hug him into snares. When once her eye
 Hath met the virtue of this magic dust,
 I shall appear some harmless villager
 Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.
 But here she comes; I fairly step aside,
 And hearken, if I may her business hear.

THE LADY enters.

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true, 170
 My best guide now. Methought it was the sound
 Of riot and ill-managed merriment,
 Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
 Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,
 When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,
 In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
 And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth
 To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence
 Of such late wassailers; yet, oh! where else
 Shall I inform my unacquainted feet 180
 In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?
 My brothers, when they saw me wearied out
 With this long way, resolving here to lodge

Under the spreading favour of these pines,
 Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side
 To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
 As the kind hospitable woods provide.
 They left me then when the grey-hooded Even,
 Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,
 Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain. 190
 But where they are, and why they came not back,
 Is now the labour of my thoughts. 'Tis likeliest
 They had engaged their wandering steps too far;
 And envious darkness, ere they could return,
 Had stole them from me. Else, O thievish Night,
 Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,
 In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars
 That Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps
 With everlasting oil to give due light
 To the misled and lonely traveller? 200
 This is the place, as well as I may guess,
 Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
 Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear;
 Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
 What might this be? A thousand fantasies
 Begin to throng into my memory,
 Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
 And airy tongues that syllable men's names
 On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.
 These thoughts may startle well, but not astound 210
 The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
 By a strong siding champion, Conscience.
 O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
 Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,
 And thou unblemished form of Chastity!
 I see ye visibly, and now believe
 That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
 Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
 Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,
 To keep my life and honour unassailed. . . . 220
 Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
 I did not err: there does a sable cloud
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
 And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.

I cannot hallo to my brothers, but
 Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
 I'll venture; for my new-enlivened spirits
 Prompt me, and they perhaps are not far off.

SONG

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen 230
 Within thy airy shell
 By slow Meander's margent green,
 And in the violet-embroidered vale
 Where the love-lorn nightingale
 Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
 Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
 That liketh thy Narcissus are?
 O, if thou have
 Hid them in some flowery cave,
 Tell me but where, 240
 Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere!
 So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
 And give resounding grace to all Heaven's harmonies!

Comus. Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
 Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
 Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air
 To testify his hidden residence.
 How sweetly did they float upon the wings
 Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night, 250
 At every fall smoothing the raven down
 Of darkness till it smiled! I have oft heard
 My mother Circe with the Sirens three,
 Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,
 Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs,
 Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul,
 And lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept,
 And chid her barking waves into attention,
 And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause.
 Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense, 260
 And in sweet madness robbed it of itself;
 But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
 Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
 I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,

And she shall be my queen.—Hail, foreign wonder!
 Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,
 Unless the goddess that in rural shrine
 Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song,
 Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog
 To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood. 270

Lady. Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise
 That is addressed to unattending ears.

Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift

How to regain my severed company,

Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo

To give me answer from her mossy couch.

Comus. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?

Lady. Dim darkness and this leavy labyrinth.

Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering
 guides?

Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf. 280

Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?

Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.

Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady?

Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

Comus. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.

Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit!

Comus. Imports their loss, beside the present need?

Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.

Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?

Lady. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips. 290

Comus. Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox

In his loose traces from the furrow came,

And the swinked hedger at his supper sat.

I saw them under a green mantling vine,

That crawls along the side of yon small hill,

Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;

Their port was more than human, as they stood.

I took it for a faery vision

Of some gay creatures of the element,

That in the colours of the rainbow live,

And play i' the plighted clouds. I was awe-strook,

And, as I passed, I worshipped. If those you seek,

It were a journey like the path to Heaven

To help you find them.

Lady.

Gentle villager,

What readiest way would bring me to that place?

Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

Lady. To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,
In such a scant allowance of star-light,
Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,
Without the sure guess of well-practised feet. 310

Comus. I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;
And, if your stray attendance be yet lodged,
Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse. If otherwise,
I can conduct you, Lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe 320
Till further quest.

Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls
And courts of princes, where it first was named,
And yet is most pretended. In a place
Less warranted than this, or less secure,
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.
Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportioned strength! Shepherd, lead on. 330

The Two BROTHERS.

Eld. Bro. Unmuffle, ye faint stars; and thou, fair moon,
That won't st to love the traveller's benison,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here
In double night of darkness and of shades;
Or, if your influence be quite dammed up
With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long levelled rule of streaming light, 340
And thou shalt be our Star of Arcady,
Or Tyrian Cynosure.

Sec. Bro. Or, if our eyes

Be barred that happiness, might we but hear
 The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes,
 Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,
 Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock
 Count the night-watchers to his feathery dames,
 'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering,
 In this close dungeon of innumerable boughs.
 But, oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister!
 Where may she wander now, whither betake her
 From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles?
 Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
 Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm
 Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.
 What if in wild amazement and affright,
 Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp
 Of savage hunger, or of savage heat!

350

Eld. Bro. Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite
 To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;
 For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
 What need a man forestall his date of grief,
 And run to meet what he would most avoid?
 Or, if they be but false alarms of fear,
 How bitter is such self-delusion!
 I do not think my sister so to seek,
 Or so unprincipled in virtue's book,
 And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,
 As that the single want of light and noise
 (Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
 Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
 And put them into misbecoming plight.
 Virtue could see to do what Virtue would
 By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
 Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self
 Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
 Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,
 She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
 That, in the various bustle of resort,
 Were all to-ruffled, and sometimes impaired.
 He that has light within his own clear breast
 May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day:
 But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
 Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;

360

370

380

Himself is his own dungeon.

Sec. Bro.

'Tis most true
That musing meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,
And sits as safe as in a senate-house;
For who would rob a hermit of his weeds,
His few books, or his beads, or maple dish,
Or do his grey hairs any violence?
But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye
To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit,
From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.
You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps
Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den,
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on Opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.
Of night or loneliness it recks me not;
I fear the dread events that dog them both,
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person
Of our unowned sister.

390

400

Eld. Bro.

I do not, brother,
Infer as if I thought my sister's state
Secure without all doubt or controversy;
Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate the event, my nature is
That I incline to hope rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.
My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine; she has a hidden strength,
Which you remember not.

410

Sec. Bro.

What hidden strength,
Unless the strength of Heaven, if you mean that?

Eld. Bro. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength,
Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own.

'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:
She that has that is clad in complete steel,
And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,

420

Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds;
Where, through the sacred rays of chastity,
No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaineer,
Will dare to soil her virgin purity.
Yea, there where very desolation dwells,
By grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades,
She may pass on with unblenched majesty, 430
Be it not done in pride, or in presumption.
Some say no evil thing that walks by night,
In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magic chains at curfew time,
No goblin or swart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.
Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece
To testify the arms of chastity? 440
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,
Fair silver-shafted queen for ever chaste,
Wherewith she tamed the brindled lioness
And spotted mountain-pard, but set at nought
The frivolous bow of Cupid; gods and men
Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods.
What was the snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,
But rigid looks of chaste austerity, 450
And noble grace that dashed brute violence
With sudden adoration and blank awe?
So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dreams and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape, 460
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal. But, when lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,

Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
 The soul grows clotted by contagion,
 Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
 The divine property of her first being.
 Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp 470
 Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres,
 Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave,
 As loth to leave the body that it loved,
 And linked itself by carnal sensuality
 To a degenerate and degraded state.

Sec. Bro. How charming is divine Philosophy!
 Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
 But musical as is Apollo's lute,
 And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
 Where no crude surfeit reigns.

Eld. Bro. List! list! I hear 480
 Some far-off hallo break the silent air.

Sec. Bro. Methought so too; what should it be?

Eld. Bro. For certain,
 Either some one, like us, night-foundered here,
 Or else some neighbour woodman, or, at worst,
 Some roving robber calling to his fellows.

Sec. Bro. Heaven keep my sister! Again, again, and
 near!
 Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

Eld. Bro. I'll hallo.
 If he be friendly, he comes well: if not,
 Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us!

The ATTENDANT SPIRIT, habited like a shepherd.

That hallo I should know. What are you? speak. 490
 Come not too near; you fall on iron stakes else.

Spir. What voice is that? my young Lord? speak again.

Sec. Bro. O brother, 'tis my father's Shepherd, sure.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed
 The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
 And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale. *Thyrsis*
 How camest thou here, good swain? Hath any ram
 Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,
 Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?
 How couldst thou find this dark sequestered nook? 500

Spir. O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,

I came not here on such a trivial toy
 As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth
 Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth
 That doth enrich these downs is worth a thought
 To this my errand, and the care it brought.
 But, oh! my virgin Lady, where is she?
 How chance she is not in your company?

Eld. Bro. To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame
 Or our neglect, we lost her as we came. 510

Spir. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.

Eld. Bro. What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly
 shew.

Spir. I'll tell ye. 'Tis not vain or fabulous
 (Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)
 What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse,
 Storied of old in high immortal verse
 Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles,
 And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell;
 For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood, 520
 Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,
 Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,
 Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries,
 And here to every thirsty wanderer
 By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
 With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison
 The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
 And the inglorious likeness of a beast

Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage
 Charactered in the face. This have I learnt 530
 Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts
 That brow this bottom glade; whence night by night
 He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl
 Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,
 Doing abhorred rites to Hecate

In their obscurèd haunts of inmost bowers.
 Yet have they many baits and guileful spells
 To inveigle and invite the unwary sense
 Of them that pass unweeting by the way.
 This evening late, by then the chewing flocks 540
 Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb
 Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold,

I sat me down to watch upon a bank
 With ivy canopied, and interwove
 With flaunting honeysuckle, and began,
 Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,
 To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
 Till fancy had her fill. But ere a close
 The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,
 And filled the air with barbarous dissonance; 550
 At which I ceased, and listened them a while,
 Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
 Gave respite to the drowsy-flighted steeds
 That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep.
 At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
 Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
 And stole upon the air, that even Silence
 Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
 Deny her nature, and be never more,
 Still to be so displaced. I was all ear, 560
 And took in strains that might create a soul
 Under the ribs of Death. But, oh! ere long
 Too well I did perceive it was the voice
 Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister.
 Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear;
 And "O poor hapless nightingale," thought I,
 "How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!"
 Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,
 Through paths and turnings often trod by day,
 Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place 570
 Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise
 (For so by certain signs I knew), had met
 Already, ere my best speed could prevent,
 The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey;
 Who gently asked if he had seen such two,
 Supposing him some neighbour villager.
 Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed
 Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung
 Into swift flight, till I had found you here;
 But further know I not.

Sec. Bro. O night and shades, 580
 How are ye joined with hell in triple knot
 Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,
 Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence

You gave me, brother?

Eld. Bro. Yes, and keep it still;
 Lean on it safely; not a period
 Shall be unsaid for me. Against the threats
 Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
 Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm:
 Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
 Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled; 590
 Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm
 Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
 But evil on itself shall back recoil,
 And mix no more with goodness, when at last,
 Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,
 It shall be in eternal restless change
 Self-fed and self-consuméd. If this fail,
 The pillared firmament is rottenness,
 And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on!
 Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven 600
 May never this just sword be lifted up;
 But, for that damned magician, let him be girt
 With all the griesly legions that troop
 Under the sooty flag of Acheron,
 Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
 'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,
 And force him to return his purchase back,
 Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
 Cursed as his life.

Spir. Alas! good venturous youth,
 I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise; 610
 But here thy sword can do thee little stead.
 Far other arms and other weapons must
 Be those that quell the might of hellish charms.
 He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
 And crumble all thy sinews.

Eld. Bro. Why, prithee, Shepherd,
 How durst thou then thyself approach so near
 As to make this relation?

Spir. Care and utmost shifts
 How to secure the lady from surprisal
 Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,
 Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled 620
 In every virtuous plant and healing herb

That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray.
 He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing;
 Which when I did, he on the tender grass
 Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,
 And in requital ope his leathern scrip,
 And show me simples of a thousand names,
 Telling their strange and vigorous faculties.
 Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
 But of divine effect, he culled me out. 630
 The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
 But in another country, as he said,
 Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil:
 Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain
 Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon;
 And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly
 That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave.
 He called it Hæmony, and gave it me,
 And bade me keep it as of sovran use
 'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp, 640
 Or ghastly Furies' apparition.
 I pursed it up, but little reckoning made,
 Till now that this extremity compelled.
 But now I find it true; for by this means
 I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,
 Entered the very lime-twigs of his spells,
 And yet came off. If you have this about you
 (As I will give you when we go) you may
 Boldly assault the necromancer's hall;
 Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood 650
 And brandished blade rush on him: break his glass,
 And shed the luscious liquid on the ground;
 But seize his wand. Though he and his curst crew
 Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,
 Or like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,
 Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.
Eld. Bro. Thyrsis, lead on apace; I'll follow thee;
 And some good angel bear a shield before us!

The scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties. COMUS appears with his rabble, and THE LADY set in an enchanted chair: to whom he offers his glass; which she puts by, and goes about to rise.

Comus. Nay, Lady, sit. If I but wave this wand,

Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster, 660
 And you a statue, or as Daphne was,
 Root-bound, that fled Apollo.

Lady. Fool, do not boast.

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
 With all thy charms, although this corporal rind
 Thou hast immanacled while Heaven sees good.

Comus. Why are you vexed, Lady? why do you frown?
 Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates
 Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures
 That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
 When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns 670
 Brisk as the April buds in primrose season.

And first behold this cordial julep here,
 That flames and dances in his crystal bounds,
 With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.

Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone
 In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena

Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
 To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.

Why should you be so cruel to yourself,
 And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent 680
 For gentle usage and soft delicacy?

But you invert the covenants of her trust,
 And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,
 With that which you received on other terms,
 Scorning the unexempt condition

By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
 Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
 That have been tired all day without repast,
 And timely rest have wanted. But, fair virgin,
 This will restore all soon.

Lady. 'Twill not, false traitor! 690

'Twill not restore the truth and honesty
 That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies.
 Was this the cottage and the safe abode

Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
 These oughly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!
 Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!

Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence
 With vizored falsehood and base forgery?
 And would'st thou seek again to trap me here

With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute?
 Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,
 I would not taste thy treasonous offer. None
 But such as are good men can give good things;
 And that which is not good is not delicious
 To a well-governed and wise appetite.

Comus. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears
 To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,
 And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,
 Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence!
 Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
 With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
 Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
 Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,
 But all to please and sate the curious taste?
 And set to work millions of spinning worms,
 That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk,
 To deck her sons; and, that no corner might
 Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
 She hatched the all-worshipped ore and precious gems,
 To store her children with. If all the world
 Should, in a pet of temperance, feed on pulse,
 Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
 The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,
 Not half his riches known, and yet despised;
 And we should serve him as a grudging master,
 As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
 And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,
 Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
 And strangled with her waste fertility:
 The earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with
 plumes,

The herds would over-multitude their lords;
 The sea o'erfraught would swell, and the unsought
 diamonds

Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,
 And so bestud with stars, that they below
 Would grow inured to light, and come at last
 To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.
 List, Lady; be not coy, and be not cozened
 With that same vaunted name, Virginitie.
 Beauty is Nature's coin; must not be hoarded,

But must be current; and the good thereof 740
 Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
 Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself.
 If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
 It withers on the stalk with languished head.
 Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
 In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,
 Where most may wonder at the workmanship.
 It is for homely features to keep home;
 They had their name thence: coarse complexions
 And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply 750
 The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.
 What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,
 Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn?
 There was another meaning in these gifts;
 Think what, and be advised; you are but young yet.
Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
 In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
 Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
 Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
 I hate when vice can bolt her arguments 760
 And virtue has no tongue to check her pride.
 Impostor! do not charge most innocent Nature,
 As if she would her children should be riotous
 With her abundance. She, good cateress,
 Means her provision only to the good,
 That live according to her sober laws,
 And holy dictate of spare Temperance.
 If every just man that now pines with want
 Had but a moderate and beseeeming share
 Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury 770
 Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
 Nature's full blessings would be well dispensed
 In unsuperfluous even proportion,
 And she no whit encumbered with her store;
 And then the Giver would be better thanked
 His praise due paid: for swinish gluttony
 Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,
 But with besotted base ingratitude
 Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. Shall I go on?
 Or have I said enow? To him that dares 780
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words

Against the sun-clad power of chastity
 Fain would I something say;—yet to what end?
 Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend
 The sublime notion and high mystery
 That must be uttered to unfold the sage
 And serious doctrine of Virginity;
 And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
 More happiness than this thy present lot.
 Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric, 790
 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence;
 Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.
 Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence
 That dumb things would be moved to sympathise,
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
 Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,
 Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.

Comus. She fables not. I feel that I do fear 800
 Her words set off by some superior power;
 And, though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew
 Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove
 Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus
 To some of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble,
 And try her yet more strongly.—Come, no more!
 This is mere moral babble, and direct
 Against the canon laws of our foundation.
 I must not suffer this; yet 'tis but the lees
 And settlings of a melancholy blood. 810
 But this will cure all straight; one sup of this
 Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
 Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.

The BROTHERS rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground: his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in. The ATTENDANT SPIRIT comes in.

Spir. What! have you let the false enchanter scape?
 O ye mistook; ye should have snatched his wand,
 And bound him fast. Without his rod reversed,
 And backward mutters of dissevering power,
 We cannot free the Lady that sits here
 In stony fetters fixed and motionless.

Yet stay: be not disturbed; now I bethink me, 820
 Some other means I have which may be used,
 Which once of Melibœus old⁶ I learnt,
 The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.

There is a gentle Nymph not far from hence,
 That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream:
 Sabrina is her name: a virgin pure;
 Whilom she was the daughter of Loctrine,
 That had the sceptre from his father Brute.
 She, guileless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
 Of her enraged stepdame, Guendolen, 830
 Commended her fair innocence to the flood
 That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.
 The water-nymphs, that in the bottom played,
 Help up their pearled wrists, and took her in,
 Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall;
 Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,
 And gave her to his daughter to imbathe
 In nectared lavers strewed with asphodil,
 And through the porch and inlet of each sense
 Dropt in ambrosial oils, till she revived, 840
 And underwent a quick immortal change,
 Made Goddess of the river. Still she retains
 Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
 Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
 Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs
 That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,
 Which she with precious vial'd liquors heals:
 For which the shepherds, at their festivals,
 Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
 And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream 850
 Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.
 And, as the old swain said, she can unlock
 The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,
 If she be right invoked in warbled song;
 For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift
 To aid a virgin, such as was herself,
 In hard-besetting need. This will I try,
 And add the power of some adjuring verse.

SONG

Sabrina fair,
 Listen where thou art sitting 860
 Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
 In twisted braids of lilies knitting
 The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
 Listen for dear honour's sake,
 Goddess of the silver lake,
 Listen and save!

Listen, and appear to us,
 In name of great Oceanus.
 By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
 And Tethys' grave majestic pace; 870
 By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
 And the Carpathian wizard's hook;
 By scaly Triton's winding shell,
 And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell;
 By Leucothea's lovely hands,
 And her son that rules the strands;
 By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
 And the songs of Sirens sweet;
 By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
 And fair Ligea's golden comb, 880
 Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks
 Sleeking her soft alluring locks;
 By all the Nymphs that nightly dance
 Upon thy streams with wily glance;
 Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head
 From thy coral-paven bed,
 And bridle in thy headlong wave,
 Till thou our summons answered have.
 Listen and save!

SABRINA rises, attended by Water-nymphs, and sings.

By the rushy-fringed bank, 890
 Where grows the willow and the osier dank,
 My sliding chariot stays,
 Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen
 Of turkis blue, and emerald green,
 That in the channel strays;

Whilst from off the waters fleet
 Thus I set my printless feet
 O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
 That bends not as I tread.
 Gentle swain, at thy request
 I am here! 900

Spir. Goddess dear,
 We implore thy powerful hand
 To undo the charmèd band
 Of true virgin here distressed
 Through the force and through the wile
 Of unblessed enchanter vile.

Sabr. Shepherd, 'tis my office best
 To help ensnarèd chastity.
 Brightest Lady, look on me. 910
 Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
 Drops that from my fountain pure
 I have kept of precious cure;
 Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
 Thrice upon thy rubied lip:
 Next this marble venomèd seat,
 Smeared with gums of glutinous heat,
 I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.
 Now the spell hath lost his hold;
 And I must haste ere morning hour
 To wait in Amphitrite's bower. 920

SABRINA descends, and THE LADY rises out of her seat.

Spir. Virgin, daughter of Loctrine,
 Sprung of old Anchises' line,
 May thy brimmèd waves for this
 Their full tribute never miss
 From a thousand petty rills,
 That tumble down the snowy hills:
 Summer drouth or singèd air
 Never scorch thy tresses fair,
 Nor wet October's torrent flood
 Thy molten crystal fill with mud; 930
 May thy billows roll ashore
 The beryl and the golden ore;
 May thy lofty head be crowned
 With many a tower and terrace round,

And here and there thy banks upon
 With groves of myrrh and cinnamon.
 Come, Lady; while Heaven lends us grace,
 Let us fly this cursed place,
 Lest the sorcerer us entice 940
 With some other new device.
 Not a waste or needlèss sound
 Till we come to holier ground.
 I shall be your faithful guide
 Through this gloomy covert wide;
 And not many furlongs thence
 Is your Father's residence,
 Where this night are met in state
 Many a friend to gratulate
 His wished presence, and beside 950
 All the swains that there abide
 With jigs and rural dance resort.
 We shall catch them at their sport,
 And our sudden coming there
 Will double all their mirth and cheer.
 Come, let us haste; the stars grow high,
 But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow Town, and the President's Castle: then come in Country Dancers; after them the ATTENDANT SPIRIT, with the two BROTHERS and THE LADY.

SONG

Spir. Back, shepherds, back! Enough your play
 Till next sun-shine holiday.
 Here be, without duck or nod, 960
 Other trippings to be trod
 Of lighter toes, and such court guise
 As Mercury did first devise
 With the mincing Dryades
 On the lawns and on the leas.

This second Song presents them to their Father and Mother.

Noble Lord and Lady bright,
 I have brought ye new delight.
 Here behold so goodly grown
 Three fair branches of your own.
 Heaven hath timely tried their youth, 970
 Their faith, their patience, and their truth,

And sent them here through hard assays
 With a crown of deathless praise,
 To triumph in victorior^s dance
 O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The dances ended, the SPIRIT epiloguises.

Spir. To the ocean now I fly,
 And those happy climes that lie
 Where day never shuts his eye,
 Up in the broad fields of the sky.
 There I suck the liquid air, 980
 All amidst the gardens fair
 Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
 That sing about the golden tree.
 Along the crisped shades and bowers
 Revels the spruce and jocund Spring;
 The Graces and the rosy-bosomed Hours
 Thither all their bounties bring.
 There eternal Summer dwells,
 And west winds with musky wing
 About the cedarn alleys fling 990
 Nard and cassia's balmy smells.
 Iris there with humid bow
 Waters the odorous banks, that blow
 Flowers of more mingled hue
 Than her purpled scarf can shew,
 And drenches with Elysian dew
 (List, mortals, if your ears be true)
 Beds of hyacinth and roses,
 Where young Adonis oft reposes,
 Waxing well of his deep wound, 1000
 In slumber soft, and on the ground
 Sadly sits the Assyrian queen.
 But far above, in spangled sheen,
 Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced
 Holds his dear Psyche, sweet entranced
 After her wandering labours long,
 Till free consent the gods among
 Make her his eternal bride,
 And from her fair unspotted side
 Two blissful twins are to be born, 1010
 Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn,

But now my task is smoothly done:
 I can fly, or I can run
 Quickly to the green earth's end,
 Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
 And from thence can soar as soon
 To the corners of the moon.
 Mortals, that would follow me,
 Love Virtue; she alone is free.
 She can teach ye how to climb
 Higher than the sphery chime;
 Or, if Virtue feeble were,
 Heaven itself would stoop to her.

1020

LYCIDAS

In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637; and, by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy, then in their height.

YET once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
 Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
 I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
 And with forced fingers rude
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
 Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear
 Compels me to disturb your season due;
 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
 Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
 He must not float upon his watery bier
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
 Without the meed of some melodious tear.

10

Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well
 That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;
 Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
 Hence with denial vain and coy excuse:
 So may some gentle Muse
 With lucky words favour *my* destined urn,

20

And as he passes turn,

And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;
Together both, ere the high fawns appeared
Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,
We drove a-field, and both together heard
What time the grey-fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the star that rose at evening bright 30
Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute;

Tempered to the oaten flute,
Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long;
And old Damocetas loved to hear our song.

But, oh! the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone and never must return!
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown, 40
And all their echoes, mourn.

The willows, and the hazel copses green,
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep 50
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?

For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.

Ay me! I fondly dream

"Had ye been there," . . . for what could that have done?

What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal nature did lament,

When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,

Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?

Alas! what boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears:
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistening foil

70

Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed."

80

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood.
But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea,
That came in Neptune's plea.

90

He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain?
And questioned every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked promontory.
They knew not of his story;

And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed:
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

100

Next, Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,

Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
 Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.
 "Ah! who hath reft," quoth he, "my dearest pledge?"
 Last came, and last did go,
 The Pilot of the Galilean Lake;
 Two massy keys he bore of metals twain 110
 (The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).
 He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake:—
 "How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
 Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,
 Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
 Of other care they little reckoning make
 Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
 Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
 A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least 120
 That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
 And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs
 Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
 Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
 Daily devours apace, and nothing said.
 But that two-handed engine at the door 130
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."

Return, Alpheus; the dread voice is past
 That shrunk thy streams; return Sicilian Muse,
 And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
 Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues.
 Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
 Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
 On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
 Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
 That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers 140
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
 Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
 The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
 The glowing violet,
 The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,

With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears;
 Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
 And daffadillies fill their cups with tears, 150
 To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.

For so, to interpose a little ease,
 Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise,
 Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
 Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled;
 Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old, 160

Where the great Vision of the guarded mount
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.
 Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth:
 And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
 For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
 Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.
 So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore 170
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
 Through the dear might of him that walked the waves,
 Where, other groves and other streams along,
 With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
 There entertain him all the Saints above,

In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
 That sing, and singing in their glory move, 180
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
 Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;
 Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
 To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
 While the still morn went out with sandals grey:

He touched the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:
And now the sun had stretched out all the hills, 190
And now was dropt into the western bay
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

SONNETS

[TO THE NIGHTINGALE]

O NIGHTINGALE that on yon bloomy spray
 Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
 Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
 While the jolly hours lead on propitious May.
 Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
 First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
 Portend success in love. O, if Jove's will
 Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,
 Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
 Foretell my hopeless doom, in some grove nigh;
 As thou from year to year hast sung too late
 For my relief, yet hadst no reason why.
 Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate, |
 Both them I serve, and of their train am I. |

II

[ON HIS HAVING ARRIVED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-THREE]

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
 Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
 My hasting days fly on with full career,
 But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
 Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
 That I to manhood am arrived so near;
 And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
 That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
 Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
 It shall be still in strictest measure even
 To that same lot, however mean or high,
 Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven,
 All is, if I have grace to use it so,
 As ever in my great Task-Master's eye. |

XX

[TO A VIRTUOUS YOUNG LADY]

LADY, that in the prime of earliest youth
 Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,
 And with those few art eminently seen
 That labour up the hill of heavenly Truth,
 The better part with Mary and with Ruth.
 Chosen thou hast; and they that overween,
 And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
 No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.
 Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends
 To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
 And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure
 Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends
 Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
 Hast gained thy entrance, Virgin wise and pure.

X

TO THE LADY MARGARET LEY

DAUGHTER to that good Earl, once President
 Of England's Council and her Treasury,
 Who lived in both unstained with gold or fee,
 And left them both, more in himself content,
 Till the sad breaking of that Parliament
 Broke him, as that dishonest victory
 At Chæroneæ, fatal to liberty,
 Killed with report that old man eloquent,
 Though later born than to have known the days
 Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,
 Madam, methinks I see him living yet:
 So well your words his noble virtues praise
 That all both judge you to relate them true
 And to possess them, honoured Margaret.

xi

ON THE DETRACTION WHICH FOLLOWED UPON MY
WRITING CERTAIN TREATISES

A BOOK was writ of late called *Tetrachordon*,
 And woven close, both matter, form, and style;
 The subject new: it walked the town a while,
 Numbering good intellects; now seldom pored on.
 Cries the stall-reader, "Bless us! what a word on
 A title-page is this!"; and some in file
 Stand spelling false, while one might walk to Mile-
 End Green. Why, is it harder, sirs, than *Gordon*,
Colkitto, or *Macdonnel*, or *Galasp*?
 Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek,
 That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.
 Thy age, like ours, O soul of Sir John Cheek,
 Hated not learning worse than toad or asp,
 When thou taught'st Cambridge and King Edward
 Greek,

xii

ON THE SAME

I DID but prompt the age to quit their clogs
 By the known rules of ancient liberty,
 When straight a barbarous noise environs me
 Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs;
 As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs
 Railed at Latona's twin-born progeny,
 Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
 But this is got by casting pearl to hogs,
 That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
 And still revolt when Truth would set them free.
 Licence they mean when they cry Liberty;
 For who loves that must first be wise and good:
 But from that mark how far they rove we see,
 For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.

ON THE NEW FORCERS OF CONSCIENCE UNDER THE
LONG PARLIAMENT

BECAUSE you have thrown off your Prelate Lord,
 And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
 To seize the widowed whore Plurality
 From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred,
 Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
 To force our consciences that Christ set free,
 And ride us with a Classic Hierarchy,
 Taught ye by mere A.S. and Rutherford?
 Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
 Would have been held in high esteem with Paul
 Must now be named and printed heretics
 By shallow Edwards and Scotch What-d'ye-call!
 But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
 Your plots and packing, worse than those of Trent,
 That so the Parliament
 May with their wholesome and preventive shears
 Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears,
 And succour our just fears,
 (When they shall read this clearly in your charge:
 New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large.

XIII

TO MR. H. LAWES, ON HIS AIRS

HARRY, whose tuneful and well-measured song
 First taught our English music how to span
 Words with just note and accent, not to scan
 With Midas' ears, committing short and long,
 Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
 With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
 To after age thou shalt be writ the man
 That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.
 (Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must lend her wing
 To honour thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire,
 That tunest their happiest lines in hymn or story.
 Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
 Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
 Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

XIV

ON THE RELIGIOUS MEMORY OF MRS. CATHARINE
THOMSON, MY CHRISTIAN FRIEND,
DECEASED DEC. 16, 1646

WHEN Faith and Love, which parted from thee never,
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,
Meekly thou didst resign this earthly load
Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever.
Thy works, and alms, and all thy good endeavour,
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod;
But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.
Love led them on; and Faith, who knew them best
Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple beams
And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,
And spake the truth of thee on glorious themes
Before the Judge; who thenceforth bid thee rest,
And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

XV

ON THE LORD GENERAL FAIRFAX, AT THE SIEGE
OF COLCHESTER

FAIRFAX, whose name in arms through Europe rings,
Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,
And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,
And rumours loud that daunt remotest kings,
Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings
Victory home, though new rebellions raise
Their Hydra heads, and the false North displays
Her broken league to imp their serpent wings.
O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand
(For what can war but endless war still breed?)
Till truth and right from violence be freed,
And public faith cleared from the shameful brand
Of public fraud. In vain doth Valour bleed,
While Avarice and Rapine share the land.

XVI

TO THE LORD GENERAL CROMWELL, MAY 1652, ON THE
PROPOSALS OF CERTAIN MINISTERS AT THE COMMITTEE
FOR PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL

CROMWELL, our chief of men, who through a cloud
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,
And on the neck of crownèd Fortune proud
Hast reared God's trophies, and his work pursued,
While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,
And Dunbar field, resounds thy praises loud,
And Worcester's laureate wreath: yet much remains
To conquer still; Peace hath her victories
No less renowned than War: new foes arise,
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves, whose Gospel is their maw.

XVII

TO SIR HENRY VANE THE YOUNGER

VANE, young in years, but in sage counsel old,
Than whom a better senator ne'er held
The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms, repelled
The fierce Epirot, and the African bold,
Whether to settle peace, or to unfold
The drift of hollow states hard to be spelled;
Then to advise how war may best upheld
Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,
In all her equipage; besides, to know
Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
What severs each, thou hast learned, which few have
done.
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe:
Therefore on thy firm hand Religion leans
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

XVIII

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT

AVENGE, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
 Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
 When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones, | 3
 Forget not: in thy book record their groans
 Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
 Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
 To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
 O'er the Italian fields, where still doth sway
 The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
 A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

XIX

[ON HIS BLINDNESS]

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
 And that one talent which is death to hide
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present
 My true account, lest He returning chide,
 "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
 I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need | 2
 Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

XX

[TO MR. LAWRENCE]

LAWRENCE, of virtuous father virtuous son,
 Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
 Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
 Help waste a sullen day, what may be won

From the hard season gaining? Time will run
 On smother, till Favonius reinspire
 The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
 The lily and rose, that neither sowed nor spun,
 What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
 Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise,
 To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice
 Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
 He who of those delights can judge, and spare
 To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

XXI

[TO CYRIACK SKINNER]

CYRIACK, whose grandsire on the royal bench
 Of British Themis, with no mean applause,
 Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our laws,
 Which others at their bar so often wrench,
 To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to drench
 In mirth that after no repenting draws;
 Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,
 And what the Swede intend, and what the French.
 To measure life learn thou betimes, and know
 Towards solid good what leads the nearest way;
 For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,
 And disapproves that care, though wise in show,
 That with superfluous burden loads the day,
 And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

XXII

[TO THE SAME]

CYRIACK, this three years' day these eyes, though clear,
 To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
 Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot;
 Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
 Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,
 Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not
 Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
 Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer

Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
In Liberty's defence, my noble task,
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's vain
mask
Content, though blind, had I no better guide.

XXIII

[ON HIS DECEASED WIFE]

METHOUGHT I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescued from Death by force, though pale and faint.
Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint
Purification in the Old Law did save,
And such as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.
Her face was veiled; yet to my fancied sight
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
So clear as in no face with more delight.
But, oh! as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

NOTES

A PARAPHRASE ON PSALM CXXXVI

"Done by the author at fifteen years old," and is sufficiently remarkable on that account to be included in this edition as a sample of the work of the boy Milton. The metre of the paraphrase is distinctly good and appropriate to the original. And I rather think that if the paraphrase be judged as a paraphrase (and it does not pretend to be more) a similar verdict must be passed upon Milton's handling of it. It must not be forgotten that some of these verses have been taken to form a hymn, which, if now old-fashioned, has in the past achieved a certain popularity. It may be noted that we find in both of Milton's early paraphrases signs which show that he had studied carefully the poetry of Spenser and also Sylvester's popular translation of the *Divine Weeks and Works* of the French religious poet Du Bartas.

ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

This ode, or hymn, was written by Milton for the Christmas Day of 1629, just after attaining the age of twenty-one, while still at Cambridge. He probably formed the design of writing a series of short religious poems on the chief events in the life of Christ. Cf. *The Passion* and the *Ode on the Circumcision*, and note the place of *Paradise Regained* (on the Temptation) in this connection.

An ode is a poem intended to be sung or recited to a musical accompaniment, and in its *regular* form consists of a definite arrangement of a series of uniform stanzas. Many English odes are *irregular* in structure.

The introductory stanzas of this ode follow the metrical arrangement of Spenser's *Four Hymns*, a variation of the Italian stanza of eight lines, reduced to seven by Chaucer, and rhyming on the system a b a b b c c. Note that the last line of each stanza contains six feet (an alexandrine), the others five. The hymn itself consists of a regular series of eight-lined stanzas, rhyming a a b c c b d d, concluding with an alexandrine. The metre is Milton's own invention.

In spite of the presence of fantastic conceits (*see* Introduction) this ode possesses a grandeur of thought and conception all its own. Hallam calls it "perhaps the finest [ode] in the English language."

Line 6. *deadly forfeit*, penalty of death. Christ redeems from the penalty of spiritual and eternal death.

8. *unsufferable*, unbearable. †

10. *he wont*, he was wont, was accustomed.

11. *Trinal Unity*, the Trinity; three persons in one Godhead.

13. *courts of everlasting day*, courts of heaven, where there is no night. †

14. *darksome house of mortal clay*, the body in which the spiritual light is clouded over by human sin.

15. *Heavenly Muse*, the inspirer of sacred poetry.

21. *spangled host*, the stars.

23. *wizards*, the Magi.

24. *prevent*, go before.

36. *lusty*, pleasant.

47. *olive green*, the emblem of peace.

49. *harbinger*, forerunner, one who goes before to prepare (literally, for an army, O.E. *here*).

50. *turtle wing*, the turtle dove is the bird of peace and love.

64. *whist*, hushed, were still.

74. *Lucifer*, the morning star.

84. *axletree*, of the chariot of the Sun.

85. *lawn*, an open space covered with grass in a woodland.

89. *Pan*, the Greek god of nature, shepherds, and flocks.

103. *Cynthia*, the moon.

109. *their sight*, them as they are looking.

112, 113. *cherubim, seraphim*, of the higher orders of angels; note the Hebrew plurals in *im*.

122. *hinges*, supports on which something is hung.

125. *crystal spheres*, Milton thought of them as nine transparent hollow spheres on which the heavenly bodies moved harmoniously round the earth, hence "ninefold harmony," line 131.

130. *let blow*, cause to be blown.

135. *Age of Gold*, the far-off Golden Age in prehistoric days when the life of man was always bright, happy, and innocent.

140. *dolorous*, sad.

155. *ychained*, *ych*-an old sign of the past participle.

158. *As on Mount Sinai sang*, refers to the giving of the Law to the Israelites. Cf. Exod. xix. xx.

160. *agast*, the correct etymological form of aghast.

168. *The old Dragon*, Satan, cf. Rev. xii. 9.

170. *casts*, casts off as a snake sloughs its skin.

172. *swinges*, swings about violently.

173. *Oracles*, the ancient seats of prophecy.

176. *Apollo*, Greek god of the sun, of music and song; his chief shrine was at Delphi or Delphos, where the oracle was supposed to be inspired by him.

186. *Genius*, presiding spirit or deity of a place.

188. *Nymphs*, spirits of woods, mountains, and rivers.

191. *Lars and Lemures*, Roman household deities (Lares) and spirits of the dead (sometimes called Manes).

194. *flamens*, the heathen priests of old Rome.

197. *Peor*, or Baäl-peor, a title of Baäl, supreme male deity of the Phœnicians and Canaanites. *Baälim*, Baal in all his various forms.

199. *that twice-battered God of Palestine*, Dagon, cf. 1 Sam. v.

200. *moonèd Ashtaroth*, supreme female deity of the Phœnicians and Canaanites, more usually identified with Venus than with the moon (Diana).

203. *Libyc Hammon*, or Ammon, a Libyan deity, usually represented by the figure of a man with a ram's horns.

204. *Thammuz*, identified with Adonis, worshipped by the Phœnicians. He was supposed to have been killed by a boar on Mount Lebanon, and was mourned in an annual festival by the Phœnician women.

205. *Moloch*, fire-god of the Ammonites, to whom human burnt sacrifices were offered; well called "grisly" or frightful in line 209.

211. *brutish gods of Nile*, the Egyptians worshipped deities represented by the forms of animals.

212. *Isis*, Egyptian goddess of the Earth. *Orus*, Egyptian god of the Sun. *Anubis*, a dog-headed Egyptian deity.

213. *Osiris*, or Apis, the Egyptian deity represented by a bull of a certain colour and markings, kept at Memphis.

217. *chest*, ark.

223. *eyn*, for eyes, the *n* is an old plural inflexion, cf. the Chaucerian *eyen*.

226. *Typhon*, brother of Osiris and spirit of evil.

236. *night-steeds*, Night's black horses. *maze*, intricate dance.

240. *youngest-teemèd*, latest born.

244. *Serviceable*, ready to serve.

THE PASSION

This is a fragment of another regular ode, each stanza being exactly similar in construction to the stanzas in the Introduction to the *Ode on the Nativity*. It was begun in 1630, before Easter, and left unfinished because Milton found the theme too great for him.

Line 14. *wight*, person.

17. *Poor fleshly tabernacle entered*, refers to Christ's incarnation in human form.

23. *my Phœbus*, Phœbus Apollo, inspirer of music and poetry.

26. *Cremona's trump*, refers to a poem called the *Christiad*, written by Marco Girolamo Vida of Cremona.

37. *prophet*, Elijah. *Chebar*, a river in Chaldea.

39. *Salem*, Jerusalem.

47. *plaining*, mournful.

49. *ordered characters*, in regularly shaped letters.

50. *viewless*, unseen.

SONG ON MAY MORNING

This little piece was probably written for May 1, 1630. It is a nature-song, light-hearted and well-suited to the occasion. Its theme is much more simple than any Milton had as yet attempted.

ON SHAKESPEARE, 1630

This panegyric was Milton's first published English work. It appeared anonymously in the second folio edition of Shakespeare's works in 1632, having probably been written in 1630. In the second folio there were three new sets of commendatory verses added to the introductions of the first folio of 1623. Milton's verses show distinct promise; thus early we can find in them something of the severity and dignity which were to be so very marked in Milton's later work. The piece is not a sonnet though often called so.

Line 4. *star-ypointing*, pointing to the stars. The *y* is falsely formed on the analogy of the *y* which is a true remnant of the old past participial prefix, and is only used here for the sake of the metre.

9. *slow-endeavouring*, aptly describes Milton's own painstaking method of composition.

11. *unvalued*, invaluable.

12. *Delphic*, containing wisdom to be compared with that of the oracles of Delphi. *took*, should be "taken."

ON THE UNIVERSITY CARRIER

These two pieces are quite unlike the rest of Milton's work. They are his only attempt at a lighter style of kindly humour, and were written in January 1630-1631, while the poet was at Cambridge.

Thomas Hobson, when he died, was an old man of eighty-six, a noted character in Cambridge. For more than sixty years he had, as university carrier, driven his waggon and horses every week to Bishopsgate and back again, carrying letters, parcels, and occasional passengers. He also let out horses for hire. Thus he had become one of the wealthiest citizens of Cambridge, and when he died, in addition to legacies to his family, he left a sum of money to maintain the town conduit and an excellent water supply.

Old as he was in 1630, Hobson was still plying between Cambridge and London. But in that year the plague appeared in Cambridge and many died. Intercourse with London was

forbidden, and the poet's facetious suggestion is that the old man died because he had nothing to do. Several copies of verses similar to these of Milton's were made by other versifiers. Milton's lack of a true sense of humour renders his verses only moderately successful.

Line 8. *The Bull*, the Bull Inn, Bishopsgate Street, London.

ANOTHER ON THE SAME

Line 5. *sphere-metal*, the crystal of which in olden times the nine spheres were supposed to be made.

12. *too much breathing*, too long a breathing space.

30. *In course reciprocal*, his plying to and fro exactly to time.

L'ALLEGRO

An idyll composed at Horton, 1632-1638, with its complementary companion piece, *Il Penseroso*, probably soon after Milton left Cambridge. Each of these twin studies, of mirth and melancholy respectively, describes an ideal day spent on an idealised countryside. Undoubtedly the Horton scenery influenced the local background of the poems, but it must be understood that the scenes are not necessarily painted exactly from Horton. They are rather idealised composite pictures. An idyll (lit. "a little picture") is a delicately finished descriptive poem, usually short, and presenting a picture or series of pictures.

L'Allegro describes the ideal day in the country of a cultured youth, such as Milton then was, set free from arduous studies as well as from the cramped life of the town. The lark is heard at dawn and soon the labourers are in the fields. When work is done come the evening's recreations till bed-time, but the man of culture will stay up reading or discoursing sweet music. To a city-bred youth, as Milton was, his sensations are much more keen, though far less reliable, than those of the countryman. Hence Milton is mistaken when he thinks that the lark pipes at his window. No country boy would ever make that mistake. And Milton would have known that sweet-briar is the same as eglantine had he really been a nature lover. He is more in his own element in *Il Penseroso*.

Of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Landor says, "Whenever I come to the end of these poems, or either of them, it is always with a sigh of regret."

Note the metre, the octosyllabic couplet, with lines frequently shortened, iambic or trochaic at pleasure.

Line 2. *Cerberus*, in classical mythology the three-headed dog which guarded the entrance to the lower regions.

3. *Stygian*, by the Styx, a river in the lower regions.

5. *uncouth*, unknown.
10. *Cimmerian*, a half mythical land of perpetual gloom.
12. *yclept*, named, *y* marks the past participle. *Euphrosyne*, "Mirth," one of the Graces.
19. *Zephyr*, the west wind. *Aurora*, the dawn.
24. *buxom*, soft, gentle, obedient. *debonair*, of pleasing appearance.
25. *Nymph*, Euphrosyne.
27. *cranks*, twistings of words.
29. *Hebe*, the goddess of youth.
36. *mountain-nymph*: mountain fastnesses are the homes of liberty, cf. Switzerland, Wales, Greece.
40. *unreprovèd*, unprovable, i.e. blameless.
- 41-48. *Note*: the lark does not "startle the dull night" nor visit windows; the sweet-briar and the eglantine are the same. Milton was city bred.
45. *in spite of sorrow*, in despite of sorrow, to drive sorrow away.
62. *dight*, clothed, adorned, arranged; past participle of O.E. *dihtan*.
67. *tells his tale*, counts the number of his flock.
70. *landskip*, O.E. *landscipe*, landscape.
75. *pie'd*, parti-coloured.
77. *Towers and battlements*, probably the poet is thinking of Windsor Castle, which can be seen from Horton.
80. *cynosure*, the tail of the Little Bear, by which the Phenicians sailors laid their course; therefore used of the pole-star or any striking thing which attracts the eyes.
83. *Corydon and Thyrsis*, typical shepherd and rustic maid in pastoral poetry.
86. *Phyllis*, a rustic maid; in the old mythology Phyllis killed herself for love and was changed into a tree.
88. *Thestylis*, a rustic harvester.
91. *secure*, free from care.
92. *upland*, country.
94. *rebecks*, the old form of violin, originally two-stringed.
102. *Faery Mab*, queen of the fairies, cf. *Romeo and Juliet*.
- I. iv. 54. *junkets*, dainties, sweetmeats.
103. *pinched and pulled*, so the fairies were said to punish lazy servant maids. *she*, one of the country maids who tells the story.
104. *Friar's lantern*. Milton, like Scott in *Marmion*, confounds Friar Rush, who haunted houses, with Jack o' Lantern, or Will o' the Wisp. *he*, one of the countrymen.
110. *lubber*, awkward; Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is called "thou lob of spirits."
111. *chimney*, hearth.
113. *crop-full*, stomach full.
120. *weeds*, garments, cf. widow's weeds.
125. *Hymen*, the marriage deity.
132. *Jonson's learned sock*. Ben Jonson was held in high esteem for learning. His classical plays are said to be mosaics from the classics. *sock*, L. *soccus*, the slipper of the Roman comedy actor.

133. *Shakespeare, Fancy's child*, Shakespeare's genius is, in a sense, unlearned, intuitive, natural.

136. *Lydian airs*. In Greek music there were three "modes" or styles, the Lydian, Phrygian, and Dorian. The Lydian was soft and voluptuous.

139. *bout*, a musical passage or strain.

145-150. *Orpheus*, a famous mythical harper whose music was so beautiful that it drew even beasts and trees and stones after him. He went down to Hades to recover his dead wife *Eurydice*, and *Pluto*, the god of the underworld, was so charmed with his playing that he consented to let her go on condition that the harper should not look back at her until they had passed to the upper air. Unfortunately, when just on the borders of Hades, Orpheus looked back and Eurydice vanished.

147. *Elysian flowers*, of the fields of Elysium, the abode of the happy in Hades.

IL PENSEROSO

Milton intended this title to mean "the thoughtful man," but the Italian adjectival form should be "*pensieroso*." Here Milton turns to the subject of melancholy. The poet's pleasure is now in the nightingale's song, in moonlit walks, and the studious quiet of night. Daybreak is marked with clouds and rain, and later in the day a secluded grove gives a dim shelter from the sun. A deeper music now stirs the poet's soul, and the contemplation of the "dim, religious light" of some "studious cloister" leads up to the thought of an old age spent in a "peaceful hermitage."

Line 3. *bested*, assailed, pressed upon.

6. *fond*, foolish.

10. *Morpheus*, the god of sleep.

18. *Prince Memnon's sister*, an Ethiopian princess. Memnon was the Ethiopian prince who fought in the Trojan war.

19. *starred Ethiop queen*, Cassiopea, who, for boasting that either her own or her daughter Andromeda's beauty was above that of the Nereides, brought a flood and a sea-monster upon her country. She was placed among the stars, but for her fault was represented as turning backwards. *starred*, changed into a star.

23. *Vesta*, the Roman goddess of the hearth and home.

24. *solitary Saturn*, chief of the gods until Jove deposed him. He is said to have devoured his offspring and thus rendered himself solitary.

29. *Ida*, a mountain in Crete, the home of Saturn.

33. *darkest grain*, a dark shade of Tyrian purple. This colour was obtained from a little seedlike insect (*L. coccus*, a grain, cf. cochineal).

35. *stole*, *L. stola*, the robe of a Roman lady, but Milton here

probably refers to a hood or veil. *cypress lawn*, the lawn of Cyprus, i.e. crape.

55. *hist*, bring silently. ^a

56. *Philomel*, the nightingale.

59. *Cynthia*, the moon.

73. *plat*, plot, cf. grass plat, platform.

83. *the bellman*, the watchman.

88. *thrice great Hermes*, Hermes Trismegistus, identified with Thot the Egyptian sage who was revered as the source of the philosopher Plato's knowledge. To him are ascribed many occult books. *unsphere*, overthrow, surpass, unthrone.

98. *scepter'd pall*, regal robe, or, perhaps, with sceptre and robe (Hendiadys).

99. *Presenting Thebes*, Thebes, a city in Greece, is the scene of the tragedies of Oedipus and the Seven. *Pelop's line*, whose story was the theme of many Greek tragedies.

100. *tale of Troy*, this with the two preceding themes formed the three most popular subjects of Greek tragedy.

102. *buskin'd stage*, the tragic stage. The "buskin" (*L. cothurnus*) was the high-heeled boot worn by the ancient actor of tragedy in order to increase his height and therefore add to his dignity. Cf. the "sock" of *L'Allegro*, line 132.

104. *Musæus*, an early Greek poet.

105. *Orpheus*, cf. *L'Allegro*, lines 145-150.

109-115. *him that left half-told, etc.* Chaucer left his *Squire's Tale* so far unfinished that its conclusion can hardly be guessed at. Spenser finishes the story according to his own idea of it in Book IV. of the *Faerie Queene*. John Lane, a friend of Milton's father, also left in MS. a completion of the story. *Cambuscan*, Cambus, or Gengiz, Khan, the "noble king" of the *Squire's Tale*; *Camball* and *Algarsife*, his two sons; *Canace*, his daughter, to whom were given the magic ring, mirror, and brazen horse. By virtue of the ring she could understand the language of birds and the properties of herbs; by means of the mirror she could detect the falsity of lovers; the horse of brass could traverse the air at a marvellous speed.

122. *civil-suited*, plainly dressed.

123. *trick'd*, decked out in fine clothes. *frown'd*, frizzed, curled, plaited; literally wrinkled, cf. frown.

124. *Attic boy*, Cephalus, beloved by Aurora, the dawn.

134. *Sylvan*, the Roman deity of fields and forests.

141. *garish*, staring.

154. *Genius of the wood*, spirit or local deity of the wood. Cf. *Arcades*.

156. *pale*, precincts, enclosure.

158. *massy-proof*, proving themselves capable of upholding the massive roof.

159. *dight*, adorned, cf. *L'Allegro*, line 62, Milton seems to be thinking of old St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, or perhaps of King's College Chapel.

ARCADES

This unfinished pastoral masque was probably composed by Milton in 1633, though its date may be anything between 1630 and 1634. From the advertisement we see that *Arcades* was "presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield by some noble persons of her family," probably her grandchildren. In 1591, when the countess was Lady Strange, wife of the Earl of Derby's eldest son, Spenser had dedicated to her his *Tears of the Muses*, and again in 1595, in his *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* he had eulogised her under the name of Amaryllis. Her husband had died soon after becoming Earl of Derby in 1593, and in 1600 she married Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal to Queen Elizabeth and Lord Chancellor to James I. He afterwards became Baron Ellesmere and Viscount Brackley.

Harefield, where the countess resided after her second husband's death, is near Uxbridge, in Middlesex.

Line 1. *Nymphs and shepherds*, in keeping with the pastoral atmosphere of the masque.

5. *This, this is she*, the countess is seated in state, the actors are moving slowly towards her as they sing this song.

9. *erst*, formerly, before.

20. *Latona*, beloved by Jupiter, and mother of Apollo and Diana.

21. *Cybele*, mother of the gods, represented as wearing a crown of towers.

23. *Juno*, wife of Jupiter.

The Genius of the Wood, the deity who presides over the wood. Note the description of his powers in the lines which follow, 40 *et seq.*

26. *Gentle swains*, countrymen of gentle birth; the feminine of swain is nymph.

28. *Arcady*, Arcadia in Greece, the homeland of the pastoral in poetry. There Pan lived, the god of the shepherds and their flocks.

30. *Alpheus*, a river in Arcadia which flows partly underground.

31. *Arethuse*, a river in Northern Greece, and also a fountain in Syracuse. The story was that the youth Alpheus loved a nymph Arethusa. She fled to Sicily and was changed by Diana into a fountain. He changed into a river and flowed by a hidden underground channel to meet her in the fountain.

49. *noisome*, harmful.

51. *thwarting thunder*, the thunderbolt striking athwart or across.

52. *cross, dire-looking planet*, Saturn, thought to have a malign influence.

53. *worm, snake, serpent*.

60. *puissant*, with power to charm.

63-70. Thus Plato's *Republic* describes the movements of the universe. "Necessity" sits in the centre, supporting on her knees an "adamantine spindle," which is turned by her three daughters, the Fates—Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos. Atropos wielded the "vital shears," cutting off the thread of human life which her sisters spun on the adamantine spindle. The spindle also carried round "the nine unfolded spheres" of the planets and fixed stars. On each sphere was a Muse who sang sweet music "to lull the daughters of Necessity," hence "the celestial Sirens' harmony." Milton calls the Muses Sirens because of their bewitching music. In the old mythology, the Sirens dwelt in Southern Italy and bewitched sailors with their songs, so that their vessels ran upon the rocks near by.

73. *gross unpurged*, unpurified.

74. *blaze*, to blaze abroad, proclaim, describe.

84. *smooth enamelled*, as smooth as though painted. Note the exquisite beauty of this song.

89. *star-proof*, so thick that the stars cannot be seen through it.

97. *Ladon*, a river in Arcadia.

98. *Lycæus* . . . *Cyllene*, mountains in Arcadia.

100. *Erymanth*, a mountain in Arcadia from which flows a river of the same name.

102. *Mænalus*, another Arcadian mountain.

106. *Syrinx*, a nymph beloved by Pan. To escape him she was turned into a reed, and of this reed Pan made his famous pipes.

AT A SOLEMN MUSIC

i.e. "At a Concert of Sacred Music," dated conjecturally about 1630, but may be later. The diction of this superb poem leads one to think that it may perhaps have followed *Arcades*. It is "perhaps the most perfect expression of [Milton's] ideal of song."—GARNETT'S *Milton*.

Line 6. *concent*, harmony.

23. *diapason*, an octave in music, or a scale by which the pipes of organs are adjusted, hence here equivalent to concord.

27. *consort*, gathering, assembly.

ON TIME

Assigned conjecturally to the year 1630. In Milton's own draft of this poem the title runs, "*On Time—To be set on a clockcase.*"

UPON THE CIRCUMCISION

Written probably for the Feast of the Circumcision following the Christmas on which the *Ode on the Nativity* was written, i.e. in 1630.

Line 10. *whilere*, previously, formerly, i.e. at the Nativity.

COMUS

"A masque, presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales," and dedicated "To the Right Honourable John, Lord Viscount Brackley, son and heir-apparent to the Earl of Bridgewater."

The masque, a form of poetic drama, had been introduced into England from Italy somewhere about the year 1513, and in the reigns of James I. and Charles I. had become very popular, especially at court. The most famous writer of masques was Ben Jonson. The chief characteristics of this kind of drama were music, songs and dances, elaborate and costly scenery and dresses: dramatic action and even the poetry of the masque often became quite subordinate to the more spectacular features. Some masques were furnished with an antimasque, or comic underplot, but this is absent in *Comus*. Both Charles I. and his queen, Henrietta Maria, took part in these plays at court. The Puritan Prynne's attack upon the court plays, with a slighting reference to the queen for taking part in them, in his *Histriomastrix* (i.e. actor's scourge) in 1634 led to the loss of his ears, and at the same time gave an impetus to play-acting among the cavaliers of the court. That year the Inns of Court produced Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*, and the court in rivalry Carew's *Cælum Britannicum*, each costing over £21,000 to produce. This will give an idea of the lavish setting of the masque.

Perhaps it seems strange that Milton the Puritan should have had a share in this kind of play, but at this time we must regard him as being also a cultured gentleman, already attracted towards drama in his preparation for *Paradise Lost*, exceptionally fond of, and exceptionally gifted in music and poetry, where the chief attraction lay. And, besides, his life-long friend, Henry Lawes, the musician, provided the music, stage-managed the performance, and acted the part of Thyrsis in the play. The way for *Comus* was prepared by Milton's beautiful fragment, *Arcades*, probably composed in 1633. Unlike many of their kind, each is distinguished by poetry of a very high order. *

The Earl of Bridgewater, before whom *Comus* was presented, was both step-son and son-in-law to the Countess of Derby of the *Arcades*, who was twice married. Appointed President of

Wales in 1631 the earl took up his official residence at Ludlow Castle in 1634, celebrating the event by certain entertainments and festivities, among which *Comus* had a place. Milton's friend Lawes (see sonnet) was music-master to the Bridgewater family, and the collaboration of the musician and poet of *Arcades* was repeated, *Comus* being presented on Michaelmas night, 1634, by the earl's three children, Lady Alice Egerton, Viscount Brackley, and Mr. Thomas Egerton, and others. The masque is so evidently written for these three children that there may be, after all, some reason for the tradition that they had been actually lost in a wood some little time previously.

It is usually said that Milton borrowed the main outline of the plot from Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* (1595). *Comus* appears as a sensual evil being in Ben Jonson's *Pleasure reconciled to Virtue*, and in a Latin play by a Dutchman, Erycius Puteanus. To Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* (1625) Milton is indebted for the central idea of the invincible power of chastity and the release of the lady from the spells of *Comus*. The whole is a finished working out of *Arcades*, with the Genius of the Wood divided into the good and evil parts of Thyrsis and *Comus*. The couplet of *Arcades* yields place to blank verse with some octosyllabic couplets and lyrical measures.

The usual criticism of *Comus* is that it has too much moral teaching and lacks humour. Puritan seriousness is strongly in evidence throughout, and lends a somewhat sombre colouring to the masque, but for sheer beauty of pure poetry *Comus* cannot be excelled.

"*Comus*, the richest fruit of Milton's early genius, is the epitome of the man at the age at which he wrote it. It bespeaks the scholar and idealist, whose sacred enthusiasm is in some danger of contracting a taint of pedantry for want of acquaintance with men and affairs. The elder brother is a prig, and his dialogues with his junior reveal the same solemn insensibility to the humorous which characterises the kindred genius of Wordsworth, and would have provoked the kindly smile of Shakespeare. It is singular to find the inevitable flaw of *Paradise Lost* prefigured here, and the wicked enchanter made the real hero of the piece. These defects are interesting, because they represent the nature of Milton as it was then, noble and disinterested to the height of imagination, but self-assertive, unmellowed, angular. They disappear entirely when he expatiates in the regions of exalted fancy, as in the introductory discourse of the Spirit and the invocation to Sabrina. They recur when he moralises; and his morality is too interwoven with the texture of his piece to be other than obtrusive. He fatigues with virtue, as Lucan fatigues with liberty; in both instances the scarcely avoidable error of a young preacher. What glorious morality is no one need be told; nor is there any poem in the language where beauties of thought, diction, and description spring up more thickly than in *Comus*. No drama out of Shakespeare has furnished such a number of the noblest familiar quotations."—Richard Garnett, *Milton*, page 53.

Line 7. *pestered*, plagued, entangled. *pinfold*, pen or pound in which stray animals were folded or shut up.

10. *mortal change*, death.

16. *Ambrosial weeds*, immortal garments.

20. *Took in by lot*, 'twixt high and nether Jove, Jupiter (high Jove), Pluto (nether Jove), and Neptune, the sons of Saturn, dethroned their father and divided his rule by lot among themselves. To Neptune fell the ocean and the islands between heaven and the lower regions.

24. *to grace*, to show favour.

27. *trident*, three-toothed sceptre like that borne by Neptune.

30. *blue-haired*, perhaps a remembrance of blue woad-stained Britons, perhaps a remembrance of the classics. *this tract*, Wales and the Welsh marches.

31. *Peer*, the Earl of Bridgewater.

48. *After the Tuscan mariners transformed*, Bacchus, the god of wine, was kidnapped by Etruscan pirates. As a punishment he transformed them into dolphins.

49. *Tyrrhene*, Etruscan, Italian.

50. *Circe*, an enchantress who by means of magic draughts of wine changed men into beasts.

58. *Comus*, i.e. revelry (personified).

60. *Celtic and Iberian fields*, France and Spain.

65. *Orient*, of the East, and therefore bright.

66. *drouth of Phæbus*, thirst caused by the hot sun.

67. *fond*, foolish.

71. *ounce*, lynx.

83. *Iris' woof*, rainbow texture; *woof*, threads woven cross-ways, *Iris*, goddess of the rainbow.

85. *That to the service of this house belongs*, Lawes, the musician, himself played the part of the Attendant Spirit. He was music-master to the Bridgewater family.

105. *rosy twine*, garlands of roses.

110. *saws*, maxims, sayings.

111. *of purer fire*, because not human.

116. *morrice*, a Moorish costume dance.

121. *wakes*, merry-makings; lit., watchings, sitting up late at night.

129. *Cotytto*, a Thracian goddess, in whose honour midnight orgies were held.

132. *Stygian*, connected with the Styx, a river of the lower world. *spets*, spits.

135. *Hecap*, goddess of witches and night.

139. *nice*, fastidious. *Indian steep*, the Himalayas.

147. *Shrouds*, covers, hiding places.

151. *trains*, alluring devices.

154. *spongy*, because taking up the spells as a sponge takes water.

155. *blear*, blinding, deceiving.

161. *glozing*, falsely flattering, deceiving.

167. *gear*, rustic implements and farm stock.

175. *granges*, granaries.

179. *wassailers*, drinkers, cf. the O.E. cry of "*wes hæl!*" (i.e. "be hale!") at banquets.

189. *votarist*, one under a vow. *palmer*, a pilgrim who had been to the Holy Land and bore a palm branch as a sign that he had accomplished that pilgrimage.

204. *single darkness*, darkness only.

205-209. Note these finely suggestive lines.

218. *Are but as slavish officers of vengeance*: i.e. God uses evil things as his servants to inflict punishment for sin.

230. *Echo*, a mountain nymph who talked incessantly and for that reason was changed by Juno so that she could not speak before, or be silent after, any one else had spoken. She pined away, for love of the beautiful youth *Narcissus*, until there remained nothing of her but her voice.

231. *airy shell*, the atmosphere.

232. *Meander*, a winding river in western Asia Minor. *margin*, margin.

241. *Parley*, conversation, parleying.

254. *Naiades*, attendant sea-nymphs.

257. *Scylla*, a monster which lived on a rock on the eastern shore of the straits of Messina. It was said to bark like a dog. *Charybdis* was also a monster who lived on the other side of the strait.

268. *Sylvan*, the Roman god of fields and forests.

279. *near-ushering*, immediately preceding.

286. *hit*, guess at.

287. *Imports their loss* . . . ? Does their loss involve you in more trouble besides the fact that you are lost in the wood?

290. *Hebe*, goddess of youth, cupbearer of the gods.

293. *swinked*, toil-worn, tired.

294. *mantling*, spreading, creeping.

301. *plighted*, folded.

313. *bosky bourn*, a brook overhung with bushes.

316. *shroud*, sheltered, hidden.

329. *square*, make equal.

332. *benison*, blessing.

338. *wicker hole*, window of crossed wicker-work, lattice.

341. *Star of Arcady*. The Great Bear, into which Callisto, daughter of the king of Arcadia, was changed. Grecian sailors steered by this constellation.

342. *Tyrian Cynosure*, Callisto's son Arcas was changed into the Little Bear, called Cynosura, in which constellation was the Pole Star by which Phœnician sailors steered.

344. *wattled*, made of twigs twisted together.

345. *oaten stops*, holes in the shepherd's pipe or flute.

359. *over-exquisite*, too inquisitive, searching into too minute details.

366. *to seek*, found wanting, at a loss.

380. *to-ruffled*, the prefix *to* signifies apart, asunder, in pieces.

382. *centre*, in the dark depths of the centre of the earth.

386. *affects*, frequents.
393. *fair Hesperian tree*, the tree with golden fruit in the gardens of the Hesperides, daughters of Hesperus, the evening star. The dragon Ladon guarded the tree. To slay the dragon and win the apples was one of the labours of Hercules.
401. *will wink on*, will shut its eyes to, will not see.
404. *it recks me not*, impersonal construction—I do not trouble about.
407. *unowned*, lost, without friends to claim and protect her.
408. *infer*, form my conclusions.
413. *squint suspicion*, looking askance, a remembrance of Spenser.
423. *unharboured*, shelterless.
429. *shagged*, made rough, darkened, looming.
441. *Dian*, Diana, goddess of chastity and the chase.
443. *brinded*, brindled.
444. *mountain pard*, mountain cat or leopard.
445. *frivolous*, toy, not for serious use in war or the chase; *Cupid*, the god of love.
447. *Gorgon shield*, Minerva (Athena, goddess of wisdom) bore upon her shield a Gorgon head. There were three Gorgons, of whom Medusa was chief. Her hair had been turned by Athena into snakes. Any mortal who looked upon her face was forthwith turned to stone.
468. *Imbodies and imbrutes*, takes to itself a body and the nature of a brute.
484. *night-foundered*, lost in the night. A ship founders at sea; a horse is said to founder when it is exhausted.
489. *Defence is a good cause*, To defend oneself against wrongful attack is right, and Heaven helps those in the right.
491. *iron stakes*, drawn swords.
494. *Thyrsis*, a shepherd in the pastoral tradition, here represented by Lawes.
495. *huddling*, running waters stayed their course to hear the song and therefore huddled together. *madrigal*, a pastoral song.
502. *trivial toy*, trifling errand.
509. *sadly*, in sober truth.
517. *Chimeras*, fabulous monsters. The mythical Chimera had a lion's head, goat's body, and dragon's tail and breathed out fire. It was slain by Bellerophon: *enchanted isles*, such as Circe's.
520. *navel*, centre.
525. *baneful*, deadly.
529. *unmoulding reason's mintage*, altering or destroying the impression of intelligence which is stamped upon the face of the rational being.
531. *crofts*, fields, meadows.
539. *unweeting*, unwittingly, without suspicion of the danger.
542. *knot-grass*, the thicker grass with jointed stalk.
554. *close-curtained Sleep*, so called because the eyelids close in sleep. The litter is an appropriate vehicle for Sleep because it is usually curtained.

558. *took*, charmed.
560. *Still*, always; *i.e.* if such music always took her place.
568. *lawns*, open grassy spaces in a woodland.
578. *sprung*, for "sprang."
581. *knot*, alliance.
585. *period*, sentence.
592. *happy trial*, test which is bound to end fortunately.
604. *Acheron*, one of the rivers of Hell, here Hell itself (Synecdoche).
605. *Harpies*, mythical fierce birds of prey with women's faces and breasts. *Hydras*, water-snakes.
607. *purchase*, the booty he has captured—not "bought."
610. *emprise*, enterprise.
627. *simples*, single elements or ingredients in medicine, therefore medicinal herbs.
636. *Moly*, a herb with a black root and white flower, potent against magic charms, given by Hermes (Mercury) to Ulysses so that he might escape Circe's enchantment.
638. *Hæmony*, a name of Milton's own invention, probably formed from Hæmonia (Thessaly), famous for witchcraft and magic.
641. *Furies*, avenging spirits who haunted murderers.
642. *but little reckoning made*, thought little more about it.
646. *lime-twigs*, twigs coated with birdlime, used metaphorically.
649. *necromancer*, one who works enchantment by the agency of the spirits of the dead, or by the devil.
655. *Vulcan*, Roman god of fire and smithcraft.
661. *Daphne*, a nymph loved by Apollo. She fled from him, and as he caught her up was changed into a laurel tree. Hence the laurel was sacred to Apollo.
664. *this corporal rind*, the bodily shell, or covering, in which the mind dwells.
672. *cordial julep*, a drink made of rosewater, good for the heart.
675. *Nepenthes*, a kind of opium drink which drove away care, given to Helen, the beautiful wife of Menelaus, by Polydamna, wife of the Egyptian Thone.
698. *vizored*, masked, Comus is disguised as a homely peasant.
700. *liquorish*, connected with "lick," not "liquor," and meaning dainty, sensual.
701. *Juno*, wife of Jupiter, and queen of heaven.
707. *budge*, lambswool or fur. *Stoic*, of those Greek philosophers who set themselves to rise above the influence of pleasure or pain. Milton thinks of these philosophers as arrayed in furred hood and gown like the dons he had met at Cambridge. Other less likely meanings for *budge* are "big" or "surly."
708. *Cynic*, of that Grecian school of philosophy which professed contempt for the ordinary conventions of life. The most famous Cynic was Diogenes who lived in a tub.
714. *Sate*, satisfy to repletion. *curious*, fastidious.

719. *hatched*, stored up.
 735. *inured*, accustomed.
 737. *cozened*, deluded, cheated.*
 740. *current*, put into circulation, used, passed on.
 745. *brag*, boast.
 750. *sorry grain*, see *Il Penseroso*, note to line 33.
 751. *tease*, disentangle, comb out.
 752. *vermeil-tinctured*, vermilion coloured or dyed.
 759. *pranked*, decked out.
 760. *bolt*, sift.

797. *nerves*, sinews, muscles, strength.

800-806. Spoken aside.

803. *Wrath of Jove*. Jove overthrew his father Saturn, and afterwards, by the might of his thunderbolts, his father's supporters, the Titans. The latter he cast into Tartarus, the lower world, identified here with Erebus, darkness.

808. *Canon laws*, ecclesiastical laws. *foundation*, order, religious society. Comus wishes to give an impression that he and his crew live a pious and holy life.

809. *lees*, dregs.

816. *rod reversed*, the rod or wand of a magician was considered to be the source of his magic power. The rod was reversed and incantations repeated backwards to undo his spells.

822. *Melibæus*, a shepherd in Vergil's First Eclogue.

826. *Sabrina*, was the daughter of Locrine and Estrildis. *Locrine*, a legendary king of early England, was son of *Brutus*, a descendant of *Æneas*, said to have come to Britain and founded London. Locrine's first wife was *Guendolen*, whom he divorced in order to marry Estrildis. She thereupon raised an army and Locrine fell in battle. Estrildis and Sabrina she ordered to be cast into the Severn, which takes its British name Sabren from Sabrina.

827. *Whilom*, formerly, an old adverbial dative of A.S. *hwil*, a time.

835. *Nereus*, a water god.

838. *asphodil*, or asphodel, a lily-like flower which grew in Elysium.

840. *ambrosial*, ambrosia is the food of the gods, nectar their drink.

845. *urchin*, hedgehog. *blasts*, injuries which caused decay. The hedgehog was formerly thought to be an evil, devilish animal.

846. *shrewd*, malicious, mischievous, cursed.

863. *amber-dropping*, Sabrina's hair was amber coloured, and the waters of the Severn are said to be slightly yellow in hue.

865. *lake*, here water, the river.

868. *Oceanus*, the oldest god of the ocean. Tethys was his wife.

869. *Neptune*, was the later god of the sea, *mace*, trident.

872. *Carpathian wizard's hook*, the sea god Proteus, whose

home was the island of Carpathos in the Ægean. He had the magic power (hence wizard) of changing into many shapes (hence Protean) and shepherded the sea-calves of Neptune (hence his hook, or shepherd's crook).

873. *Triton*, a sea-god, half man half fish in form.

874. *Glaucus*, a fisherman who became a sea-god, and had the power of foretelling the future.

875. *Leucothea*, Ino, the wife of Athamas, fled from him after he had slain his eldest son. With her second son, Melicertes, in her arms she plunged into the sea, and each of them became a sea-deity, Ino receiving the name *Leucothea*.

877. *Thetis*, a sea-nymph, mother of Achilles.

881. *Parthenope* and *Ligea* were Sirens. *Parthenope's* tomb was at Naples, sometimes called by her name.

894. *turkis*, turquoise.

897. *printless*, so light as to leave no mark.

921. *Amphitrite*, a Nereid, wife of Neptune.

923. *Anchises*, father of Æneas, cf. note to line 826.

949. *to gratulate*, to welcome, cf. the Latin construction, *victoriam tibi gratulor*.

960. *without duck or nod*, without clumsy country dancing.

964. *Mercury*, the graceful, swift-footed messenger of the gods.

965. *Dryades*, wood nymphs.

985. *spruce*, neatly or daintily attired.

986. *Graces*, the three nymphs who made life joyous, bright, and beautiful. *Hours*, three goddesses of the seasons.

993. *blow*, cause to bloom.

999. *Adonis*, a beautiful youth beloved by Venus and killed by a boar.

1002. *Assyrian queen*, Venus was identified with Ashtoreth, goddess of the Assyrians.

1005. *Psyche*, a beautiful goddess who loved Cupid. Because of her mistrust they were separated, but she searched for him until they were happily united.

1015. *welkin*, the sky.

1021. *sphery chime*, the music of the spheres.

LYCIDAS

This famous elegy was written, late in 1637, on the death of Edward King, a friend of Milton, and Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. King, a most promising young man of twenty-five, was crossing to Ireland when the ship in which he sailed struck upon a rock and foundered. While other passengers were vainly attempting to save their lives, King fell upon his knees in prayer, and so died. Naturally, his premature death was not allowed to pass unmarked by his university. In the next year there was published a collection of elegies in his memory, three in Greek, nineteen in Latin, thirteen in English. *Lycidas* is the last of the English elegies in the volume.

Lycidas follows the pastoral tradition and is one of the very best English elegies, reaching "the high-water mark of English poetry." The only fault to be found with it (and in this all do not agree) is the introduction of the fiery denunciation of church abuses which has but the frailest connection with the subject. Certainly it leads one to believe that Milton could hardly have been a close friend of King, for a strong feeling of personal grief would hardly have permitted this turning aside to air Milton's own Puritan views respecting the church.

The form of the verse is new. Lines, stanzas, and arrangement of rhymes are irregular until the last eight lines.

* An English elegy has no really distinctive structure, but is a simple expression of sadness or grief artistically set forth. The "Elegiac Quatrain," the metre of Gray's *Elegy* (iambic lines rhyming a b a b), is the most successful and most usual of English elegiac forms.

Line 1. *once more*, etc. Milton means that again he sets himself to win the poet's garland by writing poetry.

2. *sere*, withered.

3. *crude*, unripe.

8. *Lycidas*, a name taken from the pastorals of Theocritus and Vergil.

15. *Sisters of the sacred well*. The Muses, sacred to whom were two springs, Aganippe and Hippocrene, which rose in Mount Helicon. According to Hesiod, Jove had an altar there.

23. *Upon the selfsame hill*, the pastoral poet's way of saying that Milton and King were at the same college at Cambridge, and spent some time in each other's company.

28. *grey-fly*, the trumpet-fly which hums in the heat of the day.

29. *battening*, feeding.

33. *tempered*, modulated. *oaten*, made of reeds.

34. *Satyrs and Fauns*, rustic gods of the woodlands—the pastoral poet's way of talking of the under-graduates of the university. Faunus, identical with Pan, was often represented as having a goat's horns and feet.

36. *Dametas*, a traditional shepherd in Theocritus and Vergil; probably referring to Chappell, former tutor of both Milton and King.

40. *gadding*, wandering, straggling.

45. *canker*, canker-worm.

46. *taint-worm*, a parasite, often called a "tick." *weanling*, just weaned from the mother.

54. *steep*, probably Penmaenmawr on the North Wales coast, near which the wreck took place.

56. *Mona*, Anglesey.

57. *Deva*, the Dee, a river traditionally connected with Welsh magic.

58. *Muse*, Calliope, muse of epic poetry. *Orpheus*, see notes on *L'Allegro*, 145, and *Il Penseroso*, 105. Orpheus was torn in pieces by Thracian women who cast his head into the Hebrus.

64. *what boots it*, what advantage is it?

68-69. *Amaryllis, Neæra*, traditional shepherdesses.

71. *That last infirmity of noble mind*. When all other weaknesses, such as doing well for the sake of reward, have been got rid of there usually remains even in the most noble minds the desire to do well for the sake of fame. Such a desire may in one way be looked upon as a weakness. The ideal would be to do well for the sake of doing well.

73. *guerdon*, reward.

75. *blind Fury*, Atropos, one of the three Fates, not a Fury but in blindly cutting the thread of life seeming to act as one Clotho spun the thread of life; Lachesis measured it off; Atropos divided it with her shears when she thought fit. Cf. *Arcades*, lines 63-70.

77. *Phæbus*, Phoebus Apollo, god of poetry.

79. *foil*, background or setting of a gem, intended to enhance its lustre.

85. *Arethuse*, in Ortygia, an island near Syracuse, in Sicily. Milton remembers that the pastoral poet Theocritus was a Sicilian.

86. *Mincius*, a tributary of the Po in North Italy. Near it Vergil lived.

88. *oat*, reed-flute, here = "muse."

89. *Herald of the Sea*, Triton, a sea deity, sent by Neptune.

91. *felon*, cruel, treacherous.

96. *Hippotades*, son of Hippotes, i.e. Æolus, god of the winds.

99. *Panope*, a sea-nymph.

101. *Built in the eclipse*, therefore ill-fated.

103. *Camus*, the Cam, representing the university of Cambridge.

106. *sanguine flower inscribed with woe*, the purple hyacinth, said to be streaked in such a way as to form the Greek word *AI*, "woe!" "alas!" Hyacinth was a beautiful Spartan youth, beloved by Apollo, who accidentally killed him with a quoit. The hyacinth flower sprang from his blood.

109. *Pilot*, St. Peter, at first a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

110. *keys*, the power of the keys of heaven (see Matt. xvi. 17-19) has borne a prominent part in the history of the development of the Catholic Church. King had been intended for the Church, hence the introduction of St. Peter here.

123. *flashy*, dull, insipid.

124. *scrannel*, lean, thin, hence screeching.

130. *two-handed engine*. There are several explanations: (1) the two-handed axe of a Puritan reformation, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. iii. 10). "The axe of God's reformation hewing at the old and hollow trunk of papacy" (cf. *Reformation in England*). (2) St. Michael's sword "with huge two-handed sway" (*Paradise Lost*, vi. 251). (3) The two houses of the English parliament, looking forward in anticipation to the time

when such a Puritan government as that of the Long Parliament should govern the land.

132-133. *Alpheus . . . Sicilian Muse*. See *Arcades*, line 31. Arcadia and Sicily were the homes of the ancient pastoral. Hence Milton is invoking the pastoral muse.

138. *swari star*, Sirius, the Dog-star, appeared at midsummer, and therefore was supposed to cause the heat which tanned and made swarthy.

142. *rathe*, early; its comparative remains as "rather."

143. *crow-toe*, crowfoot.

144. *freaked*, freckled.

151. *laureate hearse*, laurelled tomb, the tomb of a poet, or a tomb decked with the work of poets.

160. *Bellerus*, a supposed Cornish giant, whose name Milton coins from Bellerium, the Latin name of Land's End.

161. *Vision of the guarded mount*. Some hermits once saw a vision of St. Michael seated on St. Michael's Mount, in Mount's Bay.

162. *Namancos and Bayona's hold*, in Spain, taken as being directly across the sea from St. Michael's Mount: *hold*, a fortress, castle.

163. *ruth*, pity.

164. *dolphins*, refers to the story of Arion who, during a voyage, was thrown overboard by the sailors and saved by a dolphin.

186. *uncouth*, unknown; here, of course, refers to Milton himself.

189. *Doric lay*, pastoral song.

THE SONNET

"Scorn not the sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camdens soothed an exile's grief;
The sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few."

WORDSWORTH, 1827.

The sonnet is a concise expression of a single poetic idea, arranged according to certain artistic laws of melody and harmony. Its name is derived from the Italian *sonetto*, a short strain (lit. a little sound), and it was originally intended to be

recited with the accompaniment of a lute or mandolin. Some trace its origin to Sicily, others to Provence. About the middle of the thirteenth century there were sonnet writers in Italy, but the first great name in the history of the sonnet is that of Petrarch, the Italian. Other great sonneteers were Tasso (Italian), Camões (Portuguese), Du Bellay (French), with our own poets Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, etc. The first sonnets published in England were those of Wyatt and Surrey in Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557), though until Milton's sonnets appeared the English sonnet differed slightly in form from the Italian.

Musical and poetic instinct led to the length of the sonnet being limited to fourteen lines, and to its presentation in two systems: (1) the major system or presentation of the motive; (2) the minor system or application of the motive. Sensitive ears decided that the break between the two systems should come at or about the end of the eighth line. Therefore the sonnet was divided into the octave and sestet (eight and six lines). For the sake of sonority the decasyllabic was chosen to be the sonnet line, with usually two rhymes in the octave, and two or three in the sestet. The octave therefore came to be divided into two quatrains and the sestet into two tercets. There is considerable variation in the arrangement of the rhymes of the sestet, but in the strict Italian form a couplet at the close is not permissible. In all English sonnets before those of Milton the closing couplet finds a place. Milton returns to the purer Italian form.

The rhymes of the Petrarchan or Italian sonnet, then, follow such a system as a b b a, a b b a, c d e, c d e (sestet varies). Shakespeare's sonnets rhyme a b a b, b c b c, d e, d e, f f; Milton's, a b b a, a b b a, c d e, e c d, with variations in the sestet.

It should be noted that before Milton the subject-matter of the sonnet was almost always love. Milton's sonnets, with one exception, are not love sonnets, but are on various themes.

TO THE NIGHTINGALE

Probably composed at the end of Milton's Cambridge period. *rude bird of hate*, the cuckoo, an ill-omened bird; cf. its treatment of the young of its foster parents. The reference is to the superstition that any one who hears the nightingale before the cuckoo will be fortunate in love before the year is over.

ON HIS HAVING ARRIVED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-THREE

Written in 1631 at Cambridge. A friend had remonstrated with Milton concerning the apparently aimless student's life he was then leading, instead of preparing for the Church or other profession. Milton replied in a letter that he was "something

suspicious" of himself, and speaks of a "certain belatedness" (cf. line 4) in his character. "I am the bolder to send you some of my nightward thoughts some little while ago, because they come in not altogether unfitly, made up in a Petrarchian stanza, which I told you of." Milton has evidently almost definitely decided not to fulfil his original intention of entering the Church. But the sonnet closes with his intention that whatever his lot may be he will apply himself to his work with a consciousness of being always under the eye of God. The high seriousness of the great Puritan poet is thus early strongly marked.

TO A VIRTUOUS YOUNG LADY

Written in 1644. The name of the lady is unknown, though she may have been the Miss Davis with whom Milton was acquainted about this time.

Mary, sister of Lazarus.

Ruth, see the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament.

overween, think too much of themselves.

odorous lamp, the close of the sonnet refers to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

TO THE LADY MARGARET LEY

Written 1644 or 1645. The lady was a daughter of James Ley, an eminent lawyer in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. In 1624 he became Lord High Treasurer of England, and was created Earl of Marlborough in 1626-1627. In 1628 he was removed from the High Treasurership, but was appointed President of the Council. He was believed to have been opposed to the policy of Buckingham, favourite of Charles I. He died, at the age of seventy-six, immediately after the dissolution of the third parliament of Charles I. in 1628-1629; and this sonnet suggests that an old man's anxiety in the political crisis brought about his end. Lady Margaret, "a woman of great wit and ingenuity," married Captain Hobson, and seems to have been a supporter of the Parliament. In 1643 Milton often visited at her house in London, and we are told that she "had a particular honour for him, and took much delight in his company."

Charonia, in Boeotia. Here Philip of Macedon defeated the Athenians, 338 B.C. The aged Athenian orator Isocrates is said to have died on hearing of the defeat.

ON THE DETRACTION WHICH FOLLOWED UPON MY WRITING CERTAIN TREATISES

These treatises were the four divorce pamphlets, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *Judgment of Martin Bucer*, *Tetrachordon*, and *Colasterion*, 1643-1645 (see Introduction). Needless

to say, Puritan society was greatly shocked by Milton's determined statements of his views.

The sonnet was written in 1645 or 1646, in a vein of grim humour, with a pointed side-glance at the Royalist Scots.

Gordon. This clan was among the followers of Montrose, the Royalist general in Scotland.

Colkitto, or Macdonnell, or Galasp, were the names of one man, the lieutenant-general of Montrose. His full style in the Gaelic was Alexander Macdonnell, Mac-Colkittoch, MacGillespie, or Alexander Macdonnell, son of Colkittoch (*i.e.* the left-handed), son of Gillespie.

Quintilian, a great critic and rhetorician in the days of the early Roman empire.

Sir John Cheek, the first Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and tutor to King Edward VI.

ON THE SAME

In this sonnet Milton descends somewhat near to the level of that abuse which is such a disappointing feature of his prose pamphlets later. The calmness of his earlier poetry seems to desert him when he plunges into heated controversy.

Latona's twin-born progeny. Latona was the first wife of Zeus before his marriage with Hera. Because of Hera all the world was afraid to receive Latona and treated her with contempt. So she wandered about until she came to the island of Delos. There she gave birth to the twins, Apollo (who became the sun-god) and Diana (the moon-goddess).

ON THE NEW FORCERS OF CONSCIENCE UNDER THE LONG PARLIAMENT

Notice the peculiar structure of this tail-sonnet (if a poem of twenty lines can be called a sonnet), written probably in 1646 or 1647. A second sestet has been added with the first line of each tercet shortened to three feet. The first fourteen lines in the sonnet form rhyme on the fashion, a b b a, a b b a, c d e, d e c. The additional sestet carries this on, rhyming c f f, f g g.

The subject-matter is again political, and allied to the nature of the two preceding sonnets. It shows that Milton has definitely cut himself adrift from the Presbyterians on account of the reception of his divorce pamphlets, and has attached himself to the Independents, Cromwell's party, who upheld the toleration of all Protestant sects.

Prelate Lord, a play on Lord, or Lord-bishop, and Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was gaining for himself the bitter hatred of the Puritans by his Arminianism, and his attempts to bring the whole of Britain into uniformity of doctrine and worship. The story of Jenny Geddes, who threw a stool at the reader's head when the new liturgy was first read in Edinburgh, is well known.

Classic Hierarchy, Presbyterian Church government. "Classis" was the English name corresponding to the Scottish "Presbytery."

A.S. Adam Stewart, a Scot who signed his pamphlets with his initials only.

Rutherford, a Scottish member of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster.

shallow Edwards, an English Presbyterian who had written a book attacking the Independents and Milton.

Scotch What-d'ye-call! Robert Baillic, another member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, who had also attacked Milton.

Trent. The council of Trent, 1545-1563, where an attempt was made to reorganise and reform the Roman Catholic Church from within. This council marks the beginning of the Counter-Reformation.

phylacteries, strips of parchment on which were written texts from the Law, worn by Jews, and especially the Pharisees, on various parts of the dress or across the forehead. The Pharisees "made broad" their phylacteries; Milton says that Parliament will, metaphorically, "clip" those of the pharisaical Presbyterians.

TO MR. H. LAWES, ON HIS AIRS

Written 1645, and prefixed to a volume of *Choice Psalms put into Music for three Voices*, by Henry and William Lawes, published in 1648. Henry Lawes, the musician, had been a friend of Milton from boyhood. They had collaborated in *Arcades* and *Comus*, and now Lawes was a popular composer of music for songs, and also, with his brother William, one of the king's musicians and gentleman of the Chapel Royal. Although Lawes was a staunch Royalist, that was no impediment to his friendship with Milton. William Lawes was slain while fighting for the king at Chester in 1645.

Midas, king of Phrygia, judged that Pan sang more sweetly than Apollo. Apollo changed the king's ears into ass's ears to mark his own opinion of Midas' ear for music.

short and long, quantities in verse.

Dante, the greatest Italian poet, died 1321, author of the *Divine Comedy*, in which the poet is described as meeting Casella, a musician and friend, in Purgatory and asking him to sing.

ON THE RELIGIOUS MEMORY OF MRS. CATHARINE THOMSON, MY CHRISTIAN FRIEND

DECEASED DEC. 16, 1646

In 1649 Milton lodged with one Thomson, at Charing Cross, and it seems probable that the subject of the sonnet was one of this family. This sonnet has been called "the most commonplace thing that Milton ever wrote."

ON THE LORD GENERAL FAIRFAX, AT THE SIEGE
OF COLCHESTER

The siege of Colchester took place in 1648 during the second Civil War. Fairfax was commander-in-chief of the Parliamentary army. Cromwell, acting in the northern counties against the Scots and Royalists, was lieutenant-general. The sonnet expresses the general high estimate of Fairfax. But it will be remembered that later he retired from his command rather than fight against the Presbyterian Scots, and Cromwell took his place.

Hydra heads. The Hydra was a water-snake, or marsh monster, with nine heads, slain by Hercules. As each head was cut off three grew in its place. The reference is to the many minor rebellions in various parts of England and Wales which went to make the second Civil War.

False North. The Scots, many of whom were now turned Royalist under the Duke of Hamilton. *imp*, cause to grow again.

TO THE LORD GENERAL CROMWELL, MAY 1652.—
ON THE PROPOSALS OF CERTAIN MINISTERS AT
THE COMMITTEE FOR PROPAGATION OF THE
GOSPEL

The three political sonnets, on Fairfax, to Cromwell, and to Vane, are marked by dignity of utterance no less than by enthusiastic admiration. Cromwell, Milton's hero, had won victory after victory in the course of his settlement of the three kingdoms after the chaos left by the Civil Wars. Ireland had been sharply reduced to subjection; Preston, Dunbar, and Worcester had been fought and won. The cause of Charles II. was hopeless everywhere. The Commonwealth was firmly established and, for the present, free from danger from foes without. But there yet remained a source of internal religious discord to which Cromwell would turn his attention. Church affairs were everywhere in an utterly chaotic state. Presbyterians, Independents, Episcopalians, jostled each other in a struggle for precedence. There was no proper church organisation, no regularly appointed endowments, no definite arrangement for the provision of suitable ministers. And the feeling was growing stronger that the Presbyterians were arrogating to themselves a leadership which the Independents at least could not brook. Therefore the "Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel" was appointed to bring order out of chaos.

Darwen stream, a small river near Preston, where Cromwell defeated the Scots in 1648.

Worcester's laureate wreath. The victory at Worcester in 1651 was styled by Cromwell his "crowning mercy."

TO SIR HENRY VANE THE YOUNGER

Written about 1652 when the younger Vane was a member of the Council of State and about forty years of age. He had had an extremely distinguished career, having been governor of Massachusetts as early as 1636 and becoming a member of the Long Parliament when twenty-seven. He was executed in 1662. He was a theorist of revolution, of a far more intellectual type than most of his contemporaries.

The fierce Epirot. Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, in northern Greece, invaded Italy in 280 B.C., gained two "Pyrrhic" victories, but was completely defeated at Beneventum in 275. The salvation of Rome at this time, and again later during the invasion of Hannibal, "the African bold," was due rather to the determination of the senate than to the ability of the Roman commanders.

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEDMONT

A splendid sonnet marked by unusual power, written in 1655. Early in that year the Duke of Savoy had issued an edict ordering the Waldenses or Vaudois, his Protestant subjects, to become Roman Catholics or leave their homes within twenty days. An army enforced the edict, and there was a terrible massacre. Multitudes of those who managed to escape from the massacre died of cold and hunger among the mountains. Indignation at the outrage was extreme in England. Cromwell took up the cause of the persecuted Protestants zealously. Strong letters, written by Milton, were sent to the duke and to the chief European princes. £40,000 were collected for the relief of the sufferers. The duke was compelled to withdraw the edict and to allow the Waldenses to worship as they pleased.

The triple Tyrant, the Pope, wearer of the triple crown as a mark of his headship of the Roman Church.

Babylonian woe, great Babylon was destroyed for its sin, and Rome was often likened to Babylon.

ON HIS BLINDNESS

This sonnet belongs to the period 1652-1655. Milton was gradually losing his eyesight from 1651 to 1653, and in the latter year he became completely blind. His controversy with Dr. Salmasius, a Leyden professor, in defence of the regicides began in 1651 with the *Defensio Prima pro Populo Anglicano*. In this fine sonnet the poet touches upon his condition with a sorrow only half concealed, but with a spirit of resigned submission to the Almighty will.

fondly, foolishly.

TO MR. LAWRENCE

Written about 1656. The Lawrence addressed is the son of Henry Lawrence, President of Cromwell's Council. At this time he was about twenty-two years of age and one of the "particular friends" of Milton who came to his house in Petty France to cheer him up in his affliction by reading or conversing with him. Milton's second marriage took place in this year, and his life became more frequently occupied with the entertainment of guests. This will account for the cheerful tone of the sonnet.

Favonius, the west wind.

Attic, Greek, therefore cultured.

Tuscan, Italian, therefore cultivated.

TO CYRIACK SKINNER

Also written about 1656, and in very much the same circumstances and the same vein as the last sonnet. Cyriack Skinner was one of Milton's closest friends. He was a son of William Skinner, a Lincolnshire squire. His mother was Bridget, daughter of Sir Edward Coke, the famous lawyer and judge, and rival of Bacon; hence the reference in the sonnet. Cyriack Skinner was keenly interested in politics, in mathematics, and in physics; hence the references to Euclid and Archimedes, and to the intentions of Sweden and France.

Themis, goddess of law and justice.

Archimedes, of Syracuse, 287-212 B.C., one of the greatest mathematicians in history, famous for his application of mathematical principles to practical purposes, discoverer of the "principle of Archimedes" in physics.

TO THE SAME

Written shortly after the last sonnet, when Milton had been totally blind for three years (1656). The secret of the poet's admirable resignation is stated with dignity and sincerity, all the more touching because of the brevity and simple directness of their expression.

Mask, see the Introduction to *Comus* and *Arcades*.

ON HIS DECEASED WIFE

Written 1657. In November, 1656, Milton married his second wife, Catharine, daughter of Captain Woodcock. Fifteen months later she died. The poet was left with the daughters of his first marriage, and a baby girl who only lived a month. His wife's death was evidently a great grief to him; the consolation

and comfort of his advancing years was gone, and he was left to a future dark indeed within and without. His daughters never were in sympathy with him. He misunderstood them and they him, with the same misunderstanding which had once parted him for their mother. This second marriage seems to have been entirely different from the first, for in it Milton found both understanding and love. This beautiful sonnet, full of pathetic tenderness, deeply affectionate and sincere, is one of the most noteworthy sonnets in our language. There is in it a quiet, restrained note of grief which is most effective because it is so thoroughly sincere. Less restraint would have marred its exquisite pathos. A careful perusal of it gives us a momentary insight into the heart of the Milton who could love; and the moment, I take it, is unique in Milton's life. It could never have occurred before; it could never occur again. Milton brooded over his loss; dreamt of it; called back in memory the wife he loved. She was a good woman; a "saint" he calls her, endowed with "love, sweetness, goodness," and pure in mind. Milton had appreciated this woman's worth. He had evidently never seen her face; for he cannot describe it, having been already blind when he came to know her. And therefore in his dream "her face was veiled." There is one great comfort to him: in Heaven he trusts to see her, and then she will wear no veil for him, for his blinded eyes will see again "without restraint."

Alcestis, wife of Admetus, king of Phærae, in Thessaly. The Fates granted to Admetus deliverance from death, if his father or mother or wife would die for him. *Alcestis* died instead of her husband, but *Hercules*, "Jove's great son," brought her back from the lower world and restored her to him.

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